

**9:1-5:** *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service (of God), and the promises; 5 whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

Paul dramatically emphasized his point in the first verse of this chapter. He said, (1) “*I say the truth in Christ,*” (2) “*I lie not,*” and (3) his conscience bore “*witness in the Holy Spirit.*” A single word (*pseudomai*) translates the expression *I lie not*, and Paul used this term when writing other letters (see 2 Cor. 11:31b; Gal. 1:20b; 1 Tim. 2:7 for other places where he used this same word). Here this verb is in the present tense and the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:496) says it is “a formula of asseveration underscoring the truthfulness of a statement.” Paul’s third statement may have been the apostle’s way of saying the Spirit helped him write this material. Since the Spirit was helping him, he was certainly telling the truth.

Paul used a combination of positive and negative statements to affirm that he was telling the truth. This forceful presentation was done for a specific reason. Paul had left the Jewish faith, and those who had stayed with the Hebrew religion must have viewed him as an apostate Jew. In this letter, Paul taught that the Jews were just as sinful as the Gentiles. He said the Jews needed salvation. In the next section, he said the Jews are no longer God’s special people. Before he led his readers to this conclusion, he wanted them to know that he was telling the truth. Paul also wanted his readers to know that he was concerned about the Jewish people.

If any reader wondered about Paul’s love for the Hebrew nation, he put their questions to rest in verse two. He said “*great sorrow and unceasing pain*” were in his heart because most Jewish people were lost. When Paul wrote this letter, there was a very clear distinction between the nation of Israel and the church. The church was clearly seen as the body where people are saved, and the Jewish faith was seen as a religion that separated people from God. The system given by Moses is no longer in effect. It was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

While the ASV expresses Paul’s pain with the words *great sorrow*, the KJV says “*great heaviness.*” The word rendered *sorrow/heaviness* (*lupe*), which is here in the present tense, is elsewhere used to describe the pain of childbirth (Jn. 16:21) and the sorrow associated with death (Jn. 16:6). Beyond this, Paul spoke of *pain* (ASV) or *sorrow* (KJV), and he said this was *unceasing* (ASV) or “*continual*” (KJV). This term (*adialeiptos*) occurs only here and 2 Tim. 1:3. Outside the New Testament it was used to describe a “continuous cough.” As if these descriptions were not enough, Paul further illustrated his love and sorrow for the Jewish people in verse 3.

At the start of the third verse is a word (*euchomai*) that has the sense of a strong wish or prayer, and this desire is in the imperfect tense (continuous action). Paul continually and repeatedly was willing to give his soul for the Hebrew nation. While trading one’s soul to save someone else’s is impossible (14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Ezek. 18:19-20), this illustration demonstrated Paul’s great love. Moses expressed a similar love for his people (Ex. 32:32).

The word “*anathema*” or “*accursed*” in the KJV (*anathema*) “frequently translated, in the Septuagint, the Hebrew *cherem*, which signified a thing devoted to God, whether for His service, as in the case of the sacrifice (Lev. 27:28), or for its own destruction, e.g., an idol (Deut. 7:26), Jericho (Josh. 6:17)” (Vine, 1:394). In this passage, the word has a negative meaning (i.e. destruction). Because Jesus is life (Jn. 15:5-6), Paul’s willingness to be *anathema from Christ* describes the loss of his eternal well being as well as all that he held dear in life (Gal. 2:20). *Anathema* is found only six times in the New Testament, and two of the other places it occurs are Gal. 1:8-9.

Paul had some dear friends who were not in a right relationship with God. Unlike many today who reason “God is a loving God so I am okay,” Paul faced the fact that people who are not abiding by the terms of God’s word are lost. Whether that person is a mother, father, son, daughter, or another dear relative, their relationship to us cannot change what God’s word says (Jn. 10:35, the Scriptures cannot be

broken). We may grieve over the choices that friends and family members make, but if it comes to following the Lord or following family, family must be forsaken (Mt. 19:29).

When Paul described the Jewish people (verse 4), he made known what they had received. He listed seven different items that were given to the Hebrews. The first item is in verse 4 (“*adoption*”). This blessing refers back to Ex. 4:22 and Hos. 11:1. The blessing of adoption allowed Paul to ask, “Has God cast off His child (Israel) for a new child?” “Is God adopting someone else as His son?” (Owen, p. 66). The word *adoption* (*huiothesia*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (here, Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5 and Eph. 1:5). It is hardly found in secular Greek until the arrival of Christianity. Now it applies to all people who obey the gospel (Rom. 1:5).

The second item, which is also found in verse 4, is described as “*the glory*.” Glory was at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16). It was present when the tabernacle was completed (Ex. 40:34), and it was present when judgment came upon the rebels at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 14:10). The Jews had experienced and enjoyed the glory of God. Paul’s point about *glory* is similar to the point about adoption. That is, “Was God going to give the glory, once enjoyed by the Jews, to another people?”

The third thing on Paul’s list is described as the “*covenants*.” In the Old Testament God made covenants with many people (Gen. 15:18; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Jer. 31:31-34). Would this blessing continue or would God now make a covenant with someone else?

The fourth item is “*the giving of the law*.” This blessing goes back to Mount Sinai (Deut. 5:1-22). The law was only given to the Jews. In light of this Paul asked, “Is God (has God) abandoned this law and the people who received it?” Concerning this blessing (which is described by a single word that occurs only here in the New Testament—*nomothesia*), “Israel had the Law. However, even the Gentiles could boast of having the Law if they wanted it. But only Israel could boast of receiving the Law by direct revelation from *nomothetes*, ‘the Lawgiver.’ Thus Israel alone could boast of both having the Law, and receiving the Law by direct revelation. This was a great privilege given to Israel” (CBL, GED, 4:268).

In addition to the law, there was “*the service of God*” (the temple and tabernacle worship). Aaron and his sons carried out this service (Ex. 28-29). If others tried to perform these religious duties, they were to be killed (see Num. 16:6-7, 32, 40). Also, no person outside the nation of Israel was to partake of the Passover feast (Ex. 12:43, 45). Would God now allow foreigners to come before Him acting as priests and allow others to partake of the Passover? Compare 1 Cor. 5:7.

Next on Paul’s list are the “*promises*.” These *promises* included those made to Abraham. If Paul had in mind the Abrahamic promise that said a Messiah would come, the question was, “Would God’s promises to Abraham extend to people who are not fleshly Jews?”

The “*fathers*” mentioned in verse 5 include the patriarchs and other heroes from Israel’s history. These “*fathers*” helped form the Hebrew nation. Would God turn His back on these men and produce (create) new heroes?

The final point in this paragraph also comes from the 5<sup>th</sup> verse. Paul again introduced Jesus and said He was “*according to the flesh*.” This is very similar to 1:3 where it is said that the Lord was of David’s seed. Paul again told his readers that Jesus was Jewish. However, the Lord was more than a Jewish man. He is Lord “*over all*.” At the end of verse 5 the word “*blessed*” (*eulogetos*) is used. In the New Testament this term is only applied to God (deity). Expositors differ on whether it here describes Christ or God the Father. If it denotes Jesus, it is a clear statement of His deity. Robertson (4:381) boldly claims it is a “clear statement of the deity of Christ following the remark about his humanity”, but he may be too confident in his assertion. Maybe a better understanding is found in Turner’s comment (p. 49): this term “may imply that blessing is due.” Members of the Godhead are worthy of praise and honor, and the proper period to praise them is “*for ever*” (*aion*).

Though Jesus met all the requirements of the Old Testament, and He was the Messiah, most in Israel denied and rejected Him. This rejection and God’s promise to Abraham to bless all nations caused God to change His relationship with Israel.

**9:6:** *But (it is) not as though the word of God hath come to naught. For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel:*

In the preceding material Paul set the stage for discussing seven separate points. These points are:

- Others will be adopted as sons.
- The divine glory has been given to someone else.
- A covenant with other people has been made.
- Others have received a law from God.
- “Foreigners” may now serve God.
- The “promises of God” now include other people.
- New heroes are on the horizon.

Even hinting at these things would have caused outrage among those who were Jewish. This information would have caused them to allege God had not kept His word and He had violated His promises (i.e. the promises made to Abraham).

Paul anticipated these charges and he quickly offered a defense. He said, “*It is not as if God’s word has been brought to naught.*” God had not broken His word and the promises had not been cancelled. Stated another way, God’s word had not *failed*. Paul used a verb (*ekpipto*) that is also employed in 1 Cor. 13:8 (love does not *fail*).

The Hebrews needed to understand that “*they are not all Israel, that are of Israel.*” In other words, some of those who were Jews in the physical sense were not Jews in another sense. The Bible has two different meanings for the word “*Jew*.” There is *fleshly* Israel (those who are physical descendants of Jacob) and *spiritual* Israel (members of the church). Applying these descriptions to verse 6 will further clarify the point: “Not all people part of the Jewish nation are members of the church” (true Israel).

Though some were surely thinking God had broken His word, Paul affirmed that many understood what was done and what was promised in the Old Testament. God’s promises were initially made to the physical nation of Israel, but the ultimate fulfillment of these promises was to be in the church (see Gal. 3:16-19; 6:15-16). If people do not understand that **God’s Israel is now the church** (and not the earthly nation called Israel), it is impossible to correctly understand and interpret Rom. 9-11.

Some use the words *Hebrew*, *Jew*, and *Israel* interchangeably. Vine (2:271) rightly states, “The descendants of Jacob were known as Hebrews, Jews, and Israelites. These names are not always interchangeable. Speaking generally, ‘Hebrew’ suggests their speech, see Acts 6:1, ‘Jew’ their nationality, see 3:28, above, ‘Israelite’ their calling to be the people of God, Matthew 2:6. The last is, therefore, the highest title of the three, connoting the dignity and the privileges wherewith God had endowed them.” Thus, this is the title that God uses for Christians.

**9:7-9:** *neither, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed. 9 For this is a word of promise, According to this season will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.*

Before continuing to study this chapter readers should take time to again examine Rom. 2:28-29. This passage shows that those who are from a Jewish background no longer have any special privileges or rights. In God’s sight those who are Jewish are equal to those who are not Jewish (i.e. Gentiles). The only way for a Jewish person to become special in God’s sight (or even be saved) is to obey the gospel. After Jews obey the gospel, they are no more important than the Gentiles (Gal. 3:28).

The 7<sup>th</sup> verse in Rom. 9 makes this very point. Paul said that Jewish people are not Abraham’s children now, *though they once were*. To be a child of Abraham *at the present time* comes from obeying the gospel. No one can be a child of Abraham (Jews included) until he submits to the *seed* that Abraham’s lineage brought into the world (this *seed* is Jesus). Our *obedience* instead of our *origin* is now the basis for being a child of Abraham. Be sure to compare Gal. 3:29.

In 7b Paul added, “*In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*” This is a quotation from Gen. 21:12, and the

thought is very similar to the allegory that Paul set forth in Gal. 4. In the Galatians reference, Paul spoke of two women—Hagar and Sarah. The children of Hagar represent *physical* Israel. The children of Sarah stand for the *children of promise* (spiritual Israel). Instead of using the mothers in this letter, Paul used their sons.

Abraham fathered Ishmael by sleeping with Hagar (Sarah's handmaiden). Abraham also fathered Isaac. The seed line that brought Christ into the world had to come through one of these sons. Paul affirmed that Isaac was the one whom God choose.

The stress on Isaac and the seed line going through him is especially evident from Gen. 22:12. The Genesis account says Abraham did not have any other sons besides Isaac! Ishmael was alive at this time and Abraham had fathered him, so Isaac was not the sole son. Isaac was, however, the only son by Sarah, and Ishmael had been cast out of the house. Everything pointed to Isaac as being the one through whom the promises would continue. This fact may have made the Jews very happy because they were able to exclude the Arabs from the promises (the Arabs came through Ishmael). If the Jews were thinking that the Arabs were excluded and they were included, their joy was short lived (see the next verse).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> verse we find the word "*seed*" (*sperma*), and it is essential to realize that the New Testament refers to two different *seeds*. On the one hand, God promised Abraham (Gen. 22:18) that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. Paul stated how this was accomplished in Gal. 3:16, 29 (these verses should be read). If people want to have any part in the promise that God made to Abraham, they must come to the *seed* (Jesus). The second meaning of seed is found in verse 8, the place where Paul said "*it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God.*" Paul also spoke of this in verse 7 as well as Gal. 4:28 (the *children of seed* of promise). There were two promises and thus *two seeds*. Jesus came into the world as a seed, and we must follow Him and Him alone to be the promised seed. Thus, all of the advantages to being Jewish are forever gone. Although this is clearly stated in the text, many have not gotten the message about physical Israel. God's blessings have been taken from the Jews and given to those in the church; *children of the flesh* (people of Jewish descent) are no longer the "chosen ones." In view of 8b, the only way we can enjoy the promises of God is to be associated with the *seed* who is Jesus. This is why the Lord said in Jn. 14:6, "I am the way."

In verse 9 we are told how God brought the promised *seed* into the world. Sarah, who no longer had the ability to conceive, was selected to bear a child who would be part of the seed line. Although Sarah laughed at this idea, it did happen. The second or other promised *seed* (Jesus, see the above paragraph) came in the *fullness of time* (Gal. 4:4).

The 7<sup>th</sup> verse begins an argument that is different from all the previous material. Paul began to cite several historical incidents that all Jews would have accepted as true. These incidents were introduced to show that God has the right to bless and reject whomever He chooses.

At this point in the letter, Paul has already made his point. He surely knew that some were upset with him (just as some now get upset when the truth about Israel is told), but he didn't stop. He continued to tell his readers the truth about God and Israel.

**9:10-13:** *And not only so; but Rebecca also having conceived by one, (even) by our father Isaac — 11 for (the children) being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, 12 it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13 Even as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*

The opening words in verse 10 ("*And not only so*") show that Paul continued to press his point. He quickly continued to make his case from the Old Testament by appealing to "*Rebecca*." This woman also had children, but her children were in a different category. She had twins. In the preceding verses, Paul showed that God chose one mother (and her child) over another. Here he narrowed his example (illustration). Instead of two mothers, this example has only one. Paul argued that even though this mother bore twins, God was able to use one and not the other and still be perfectly just.

God could not use both boys to bring Jesus into the world. Only one of the sons could be used in the Lord's genealogy and God chose Jacob. Esau was left out of the seed line. As Lanier pointed out, this

choice did not involve the “eternal salvation” of the two boys or their descendents (p. 67).

The information in verse 11 shows that God knew about these two boys before they were born. It is also stated that these boys did not do anything “*good or bad*” before birth. The two children were in a state that was innocent and morally neutral. Even though this was true, God knew which son would best suit His plan to bring Jesus into the world. Because God “*declares the end from the beginning*” (Isa. 46:10), He knew which of the boys would best fit into heaven’s plan for redeeming man, and this gives a good sense of “*election*” (*ekloge*). God took the initiative concerning the creation and implementation of a plan, and in this plan He chose the right persons so His plan would “*stand*” (verse 11). To get the job done, God selected Jacob to be the one through whom the saviour would come. This selection did not affect Jacob’s free will. This also did not interfere with either boy’s ability to choose good or evil. God allowed both boys to choose where they wanted to spend eternity. Paul simply meant God selected Jacob because His foreknowledge allowed Him to know which son would best fit in with heaven’s plan to save mankind.

The final thought in verse 11 (11b) shows that the selection of Jacob was not based upon “*works*.” This is related to 11a—the selection was not because Jacob was *super righteous*. God selected Jacob because He “called him.” God picked Jacob because He knew this son was the best one for the job.

In verse 12 we have information that is also found in Gen. 25:23. Rebecca was warned that the “older would serve the younger.” This promise found its fulfillment in the descendents of Jacob and Esau (see 2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Kgs. 11:15-16; 22:47; 2 Kgs. 14:7).

The Jews would have looked at the first example (verses 7-9) and concluded, “Ishmael was rejected because Hagar was a bondwoman. If Ishmael had come from a different mother, things would have been different.” Paul argued that a different mother would not have made any difference. This is clear because Jacob and Esau were *both born of a freewoman*. Both boys were twins. Yet, *God still chose one over the other*, and *He chose the youngest son*. Man’s view of things is often very different from God’s. Paul’s examples are a lasting reminder of this fact (compare Isa. 55:8-9).

The information in verse 13 has troubled many people. McClintock and Strong (4:96) offer this helpful explanation: “When the Hebrews compared a stronger affection with a weaker one, they called the first *love* and the other *hatred*, meaning to love in a less degree—‘Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated’ (Rom. 9:13); i.e. on Jacob have I bestowed privileges and blessings such as are the proofs of affection; I have treated him as one treats a friend whom he loves; but from Esau have I withheld these privileges and blessings, and therefore treated him as one is wont to treat those whom he dislikes. That this refers to the bestowment of temporal blessings, and the withholding of them, is clear, not only from this passage, but from comparing Mal. 1:2-4; Gen. 25:23; 27:27-29; 37-40. Indeed, as to hatred, its meaning here is rather *privative* than *positive*. So, ‘If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated’ (Deut. 21:15); i.e. less beloved. When our Savior says that he who would follow him must hate father and mother, he means that even these dearest earthly friends must be loved in a subordinate degree; so, in the same sense, the follower of Christ is to hate his own life, or be willing to sacrifice it for the love and service of the Redeemer (Gen. 29:30; Deut. 21:16; Prov. 13:24; Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Lk. 14:26; 16:13; Jn. 12:25).”

Another important reference to show that Esau was not *hated* as we usually use the word is Heb. 11:20. The Hebrew writer’s statement is indeed strange if Esau were a damned man, someone eternally sentenced to hell. Paul’s wording was designed to show that one man (Jacob) was used and another (Esau) was not. The strength of the wording can best be understood and appreciated in light of Hebrew culture. It is also interesting to note that *hated* (*miseo*) was used by Jesus when referring to loving parents less than God (Lk. 14:26). While the term can mean *to love less*, or to hate, here it has the sense of *rejection*. “Rejection by God is described as being hated by God” (Kittle, abridged edition, p. 599).

**9:14-18:** *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth. 18 So then he hath mercy on*

whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Having said that God picked one boy over the other, Paul asked a very logical question: “*Is there unrighteousness with God?*” This question was asked after Paul had carefully explained the matter. In this book, Paul often asked questions after he had thoroughly discussed a topic. The way Paul asked his questions (he used the verb *ereō*) indicates he was not making a casual point. He was being especially forceful and placing great emphasis upon the thought (CBL, GED, 2:593).

Both Paul and his readers recognized that God cannot be deficient in righteousness. Because God is righteous, He cannot be “*unrighteous*.” Being unrighteous would cause God to be inconsistent in His nature. *Unrighteous* (*adikia*) is similar to an English word that is prefixed with “*un*” (for instance, *educated* can quickly be changed into *uneducated*). With the addition of an “*a*,” Paul altered the word *righteousness* into *unrighteousness*. Other places in this book where this term occurs are Rom. 1:18, 29; 2:8; 3:5; 6:13.

Even though God is all-powerful, there are some things He cannot do (compare Tit. 1:2). Since God is always *righteous*, and Paul’s readers knew this, they were ready to learn something else. The negative things being said about Israel (and this information was true, 9:1) were problems created by Israel. God did not create the difficulties described by Paul.

The 15<sup>th</sup> verse provides some additional information concerning God’s *righteousness*. Paul drew from the book of Exodus (33:14-19). This text describes Moses and the rebellious Israelites (33:3). Moses begged God not to cast off His people and God granted this request (Ex, 33:14-18). This incident shows that God extends “*mercy*” and grace to whomever He wants.

This truth, however, has some limitations attached to it. The devil is condemned and has no hope of salvation (see the commentary on Jude 9-10). It is impossible for God to show mercy and grace to Satan. God cannot show mercy and grace if these qualities interfere with truth or His righteousness. Rather, God sets the conditions for mercy and grace in accordance with His other attributes (characteristics) because He is God.

In our day and time, *mercy* is only available to those who are *in Christ* (Rom. 8:1; Eph. 1:3). The fact that God will not extend salvation to sinful people outside of Christ does not mean or imply that God is lacking in mercy. Rather, in accordance with His truth and righteousness God has created a plan to save man. Only those who obey this plan are entitled to His mercy. Along with God’s *mercy*, Heaven has displayed “*compassion*” (*oikteiro*), a verb occurring only here in the New Testament. This term expresses pity or compassion, and its association with the time of Moses shows that God has a strong record of extending pity, sympathy and kindness to mankind. Both God’s *mercy* and *compassion* are described with the present tense when associated with the verb “*have*.”

Verse 16 seems to reinforce this point by saying man cannot compel God to change His plan. The *choice* of heaven’s blessings belongs God, and deity decides how mercy will be granted. We cannot “*will*” (present tense) salvation or God’s blessings (pursue them on our own or attain them by ourselves). Neither can we “*run*” (attain of our own accord) what God alone can give. This second term is also in the present tense. If we hope to have any spiritual blessing, we must rely upon God for our source, and we must use the method He has given to attain it/them. Later material in this book (11:17-21) will show that Israel did not like some of God’s choices concerning mercy. Israel’s dissatisfaction with and their rejection of God’s terms for mercy caused them to be *cut off*.

Paul has advanced the idea that there is no unrighteousness with God. He continued with this thought and offered another illustration of it in verse 17. According to the text, the “*Pharaoh*” who ruled over ancient Israel ruled because God allowed him to rule. God wanted to “*show his power*” and have His “*name published throughout the earth*.” Thus, this ancient example shows how God has been able to use His power and His choice to get His will done. Pharaoh was given the opportunity to use his free will and at the same time, God was fulfilling His will. Those who have access to Bibliotheca Sacra should consult the October-December 1996 issue (pages 410-434) for a fuller treatment of how Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. In this commentary, a shorter study of the subject will be offered.

According to the Old Testament, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 7:3). This passage must be

compared with Ex. 5:1-2. While it is true that God used His power to harden Pharaoh's heart, it is also true that Pharaoh hardened his own heart by offering a negative response to God's demands. The *magicians* also hardened the heart of Pharaoh. These people were able to duplicate some of the things done by Moses, and this made Pharaoh even more stubborn (Ex. 7:11-13; 7:22; 8:8). The *plagues* also caused Pharaoh to harden his heart (Ex. 7:15; 9:27, 34; 10:16-20).

God did not force Pharaoh to oppose Him; however, God did insure that this stubborn man was brought into power, and that this ruler was presented with some choices. These actions caused God's plan and will to be carried out to the fullest degree. This was why Paul said that God "*shows mercy and hardens whom He wills*" (verse 18). What Paul described was not a supernatural act by God. Rather, men's hearts are hardened or softened by giving them choices. A similar thing is true when people are confronted with the gospel. Some hearts are softened and others are hardened. An excellent example of this is Lydia (Acts 16:14). Her heart was *opened* (14a) when she listened to the gospel message (14b).

In regard to the *hardening* McGuiggan (p. 287) makes a good observation: "If one doesn't begin with a philosophy about hardening, but rather accepts the testimony of the Bible, he will find that God hardens only the unbelieving. God doesn't harden righteous people."

Although Paul said "*the scripture saith unto Pharaoh,*" God was the one who spoke to this ruler. Because God and His word are so closely tied together, the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Another example of this is found in Gal. 3:22. Because God and His word are so closely bound together, it may be said that Scripture is a message *from* God and not merely *about* God. When we read from the Bible, we truly have the words of God.

**9:19-21:** *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will? 20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus? 21 Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*

Paul's readers may have taken the information about Pharaoh and drawn a wrong conclusion. Even some in our time may draw a wrong conclusion from some of the things Paul wrote. To prevent anyone from misapplying what he wrote, Paul penned the information in these three verses.

Verse 19 presents objections that the original recipients of this letter might have asked. The first objection: "*Why doth he still find fault?*" In other words, if God made Pharaoh the kind of man that he was (God hardened his heart and did not allow this ruler to have free will), how could God condemn Pharaoh? This would be a legitimate question and objection except Paul already showed that it is invalid. God did not take away Pharaoh's free will. This ruler was only *hardened* in the sense that choices and situations requiring decisions were put before him. Pharaoh's response to these situations hardened his heart and caused him to stringently oppose God. God was able to condemn and ultimately destroy Pharaoh because this ruler made his own choices and determined his own fate.

The second question (objection): "*Who can withstand God's will?*" That is, who can overcome God's power? If God acted like a steamroller, the answer is no one. God has the power to be a domineering tyrant, but this is not how He acts. When God dealt with Pharaoh, there were no steamroller tactics. The book of Exodus says in at least ten places that Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

The people who would have raised these objections are described more fully in verse 20. Paul affirmed that these people were arguing *with* (against) God. The unrighteous man pointed to God and said, "You have no right to use a wicked man to accomplish your will and not give him credit." Or, "God has no right to use me and then punish me because I carried out His will. I have rights." Paul argued that God does have this right; this right was used with Pharaoh, with nations that came against Israel, and perhaps is still used today. "*Repliest against*" (*antapokrinomai*) "describes one who answers back to God concerning His sovereign choice" (CBL, GED, 1:294), and it "clearly implies disputing or grumbling" (*ibid*).

When anyone begins to question God, the illustration in 20b applies: the clay says to the potter, "Why did you make me this way?" This illustration pictures a situation that is absurd. Yet, this illustration

demonstrates how God looks upon those who question Him and His works. The second time “formed” is used in verse 20 Paul used a word (*plasso*) that is also found in 1 Tim. 2:13, a verse that says, “For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” If we accept the record of the Genesis writer and Paul’s wording in Rom. 9:20, man was created. He did not arrive accidentally, through evolution, or any other means explained by those hostile to creationism.

A modern question that parallels 20b is, “Why did God make humanity?” One possible answer to this question is, “To create a type of life which would allow God to show the created objects heaven’s deepest love.” Just as a couple wants to have children to show their love to them, so God may have created man to demonstrate His care and affection.

As a potter has the right to take clay and make it into a vessel that pleases him (verse 21), so God has the right to create and destroy, as long as His attributes of truth and righteousness are not violated. To accomplish His will God uses vessels of “honor” (people who are obedient) and vessels of “dishonor” (people who are disobedient). Examples of these *vessels* include Laban, Pharaoh, Tamar, Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Just as parents know there will be some difficulties with the family they begin, so there have been some difficulties (vessels of dishonor) in the creation made by God.

Paul presented this information at this juncture to prove that God’s rejection of Israel and His acceptance of those in Christ are just. God had the right to cut off Israel and accept those who take refuge in His Son. Paul went to great lengths to make this point because he was dealing with some who did not approve of God’s methods. Even now, there are many who do not approve of God’s methods.

**9:22-26:** *What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction: 23 and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory, 24 (even) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he saith also in Hosea, I will call that my people, which was not my people; And her beloved, that was not beloved. 26 And it shall be, (that) in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, There shall they be called sons of the living God.*

Verses 25-26 show where Paul was headed with his argumentation. Paul led his readers towards the conclusion that God was able to *call people who were not his people* and still be just. As a potter can make clay into whatever he wants, so God was and is able (within the limitations previously noted) to either save or condemn people. The Hebrew people had been the chosen race for a long time, but God had the right to choose others to be His people. This right was exercised.

In verse 22 Paul said God has seen fit to “show his wrath” and “make his power known.” This means God has the right to punish people and in many cases He has used this right. Examples of God punishing people abound in both testaments. On the other hand, there have been “vessels of wrath” (people who deserved punishment) who were not immediately punished. There have been times when God was “longsuffering” towards the wicked. This term (*makrothumia*) is also found in Rom. 2:4 where it gives a reason for God’s patience and Gal. 5:22 (Christians are to have this same quality). The verb form of the word is used in 1 Cor. 13:4 to describe true love. God has always had the right to punish wrongdoers immediately or be longsuffering (wait a while). God cannot let unrighteousness (sin) go unpunished forever because that would violate His attributes of justice and fairness. However, if God did or does not *immediately* punish those guilty of wrongdoing, His righteousness is not violated.

Paul’s word for “show” (*endeiknumi*) is the same term used in verse 17. Another key word (also used in verse 23) is translated “make known” (*gnorizo*). Authorities such as the Complete Biblical Library (GED, 1:632-633) note how this word describes someone coming “to know something that he previously did not know, comprehend, or understand.” Paul used this term several times in the book of Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 5, 10; 6:19, 21).

Verse 23 further describes how God can deal with mankind. God also has the right to *bless* people. Verses 22-23 affirm that God has the right to either curse or bless the human race. This right, however, is not arbitrary. God’s treatment of man must be consistent with His nature, and He makes this *known* (*gnorizo*, a word described in the preceding paragraph). Since part of His nature includes fairness, God

*calls* (verse 24) *all people*. The Son was sent for *all* (Jn. 3:16) because God is fair and just.

An easy to overlook word is “*riches*” (*ploutos*). Jesus used this same term in Mt. 13:22 to describe the *deceitfulness* of earthly riches. In Rom. 9 and elsewhere, New Testament writers used this term to describe God’s abundant blessings. It is found in Rom. 2:4 and there describes the riches as God’s “*goodness*.” God’s “*wisdom*” and “*knowledge*” are joined with this same word in Rom. 11:33. Paul used it to explain God’s “*grace*” in Eph. 1:7 and “*unsearchable*” riches in Christ (Eph. 3:8).

At the end of verse 23 and continuing through verse 26, the information relates to people becoming children of God and their ultimate spiritual destiny. God issued a call to people (through the gospel, 2 Thess. 2:14), to both Jews and Gentiles (verse 24). This is an exact parallel to what Jesus said in Acts 1:8 and what the prophet Hosea had predicted (verse 25). Those who reject the gospel will be *vessels of wrath* that are destroyed while those who accept the call and become Christians receive God’s mercy and riches (verses 22-23) plus sonship status (verse 26). In making these points Paul used the word “*prepared*” (*proetoimazo*) in 23b, a term found only here and in Eph. 2:10. This word points to “eternity past. All of this goes back to God’s foreknowledge of man’s fall into sin and to God’s decision to send His Son to become man’s Saviour” (CBL, GED, 5:299). For good cross-references on this point, see Mt. 25:34 and Acts 2:23.

**9:27-29:** *And Isaiah crieth concerning Israel, If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved: 28 for the Lord will execute (his) word upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short. 29 And, as Isaiah hath said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We had become as Sodom, and had been made like unto Gomorrah.*

The prophet *Hosea* (Rom. 9:25) was not the only Old Testament prophet Paul quoted. This apostle also quoted from “*Isaiah*.” The quotation in verse 27 is from Isa. 10. Isaiah knew that only a small number of Hebrew people would return from the Assyrian captivity. If the number of *returning Jews* were compared to the sand on the seashore, only a fraction of them would be saved. “*Remnant*” (*kataleimma*) is used only here and it “stands in contrast to Israel as a national identity” (CBL, GED, 3:268). Thayer (p. 333) defines it as “a few, a small part.”

Paul used this Old Testament fact to illustrate this conclusion: Though there were many Jews in Paul’s day, only a small number of them would be saved. Paul knew that being Jewish in and of itself was of no value (2:28-29). Even though many Jews depended upon their nationality to guarantee them favor with God, being Jewish would not help them. Relying upon their ancestry would result in condemnation, not salvation. The only way to the Father and heaven is through Christ (Jn. 14:6). Our origin and race are unrelated to our being in a right relationship with God.

If salvation is through Christ and not by national origin, will God insist that all people come to His Son for salvation? Yes. The first part of verse 28 promises that “*the Lord will execute his word*.” In other words, Isaiah’s prophecies about the captivity came true. Only a small number of Jewish people returned from the Assyrian captivity. The Lord still *executes His word* in the sense that He will only save those who accept and obey Jesus (Jn. 14:6; Heb. 5:8-9). It doesn’t matter if we are a Jew or a Gentile. The key to salvation is obedience (Mt. 7:21).

Many are aware that most Jews have rejected Jesus (be sure to read 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Because most Jews have rejected the Lord, God will exercise His right to punish them. God will not only *execute His word* (inflict punishment), He will execute it *speedily*. The idea of speed is expressed at the end of verse 28 (“*cutting it short*”). The word “*finishing*” shows that God will certainly judge and condemn even the Jews if they reject His Son. No one can escape, if he rejects Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Another part of Isaiah’s prophecy related to the word “*seed*” in verse 29. If God had not “*left*” a seed, the Hebrew race would have become extinct. The Jewish race would have become like “*Sodom and Gomorrah*” (completely destroyed). This quotation is found in Isa. 1:9, and the application of Isaiah’s prophecy to Christianity is this: While most Jews have rejected Christ and will therefore be condemned (Jn. 8:24), some have accepted Him. The writer of this book (Paul) was a Jew who believed in Jesus. The book of Acts shows that other Jews also became Christians (Acts 6:7). Because there would be a *remnant*

(a small number of Jews who accepted Jesus), there will be some Christians in heaven who had a Jewish ancestry. However, all Jews who refuse to accept and obey Jesus as the Messiah will be condemned.

Isaiah's prophecy had a dual fulfillment just like 2 Sam. 7:8-16 and some other Old Testament texts. It applied to both the return from captivity and the Christian age. "*Sabaoth*" in verse 29 (*Sabaoth*) is found only here and Jas. 5:4. It "is a descriptive title of God's omnipotence" (CBL, GED, 6:11). In the Septuagint this term occurs more than 60 times (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:219).

**9:30-33:** *What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: 31 but Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at (that) law. 32 Wherefore? Because (they sought it) not by faith, but as it were by works. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling; 33 even as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame.*

Verse 30 is another passage that has the expression, "*What shall we say then?*" Paul used this wording to remind his readers of the previous information and to draw a conclusion. While the Jews were known for seeking God and striving for justification, the Gentiles were not normally too interested in these things. In spite of the Gentiles' limited interest in justification, they "*attained*" *righteousness* and *acceptance*. How did they accomplish these things? They accomplished them "*by faith.*" This means they used the *system of faith*. Faith is the starting and ending point for salvation (compare 1:17).

The people of Israel (the Jews) were also interested in justification, but they tried to find it by "*following a law of righteousness.*" Earlier Paul said the Law (the Old Testament system) was righteous and good (7:12). The Law was good, but the Jews were imperfect. Because the Law required perfection, and the Hebrews were not perfect, they could not be justified by the law. Notice that the same word is used (in Greek and English) to describe people *following* after spiritual matters (verses 30-31) and that Paul used the present tense to describe both groups. Just because people are earnestly and persistently pursuing a goal—even the same spiritual goal—does not mean they all are acceptable to God (compare Mt. 7:22-24).

When the Jews failed to keep the law and also failed to accept Christ, they "*stumbled at the stone of stumbling.*" The *stone of stumbling* refers to Jesus. The Jews should have understood that the Lord was their only hope and refuge. Jesus was able to give them the justification they wanted but could not attain under the Law. Instead of accepting Christ and finding all spiritual blessings, the Jews rejected Him and again failed to find justification. If the Jews had been willing to accept and obey the Lord, they would "*not have been put to shame.*" They could have realized all their hopes and desires, and they could have stood justified in the sight of God. "The Jews, like Cain, decided to bring what they wanted to bring rather than what God had commanded to be brought" (CBL, Romans, p. 159).

"The word rendered 'offense' is *skandalon*, originally the name of that part of a trap to which the bait was attached and hence the trap or snare itself. It became metaphorical of anything that arouses prejudice or becomes a hindrance to others" (Vine, 1:401).

"*Zion*" (spelled *sion* in Greek) was simply brought over into the KJV by translators (the KJV says "*Sion*"). This term is found only a few times in the New Testament (Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:15; Rom. 9:33; here; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 14:1). Originally the name *Zion* "applied to the hill where the ancient Jebusite city of Jerusalem was located. After this city was conquered by David sometime around 1000 B.C., he had a tabernacle built and the ark of the covenant moved there. As a result, *Zion* was associated with the 'temple mount,' even after the ark was moved to the temple constructed by Solomon on Mount Moriah, a neighboring hill. Ultimately, the use of 'Zion' was extended to include the entire city of Jerusalem as well as its inhabitants" (CBL, GED, 6:57).