

# EXPLANATION OF 45<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## ROMANS 9 (April A.D. 67)

### INTRODUCTION

In Romans 1:16-17 Paul stated that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: *first* for the Jew, *then* for the Gentile. However, the fact that the Jews had a position of priority in the history of salvation (during the Old Testament period up to the death and resurrection of Jesus) seems to contradict the massive unbelief and apostasy within the people of Israel in subsequent history (during the New Testament period).

In Romans 9 to 11 Paul teaches God's world-wide plan with regard to the Jews and the Gentiles. He shows how God's diverse dealings with the Jews and the Gentiles react upon each other and interact with one another for the promotion of God's eternal plan of salvation for both.

In Romans 9 he speaks about God's election of people unto salvation, with two differentiations:

- the elected Jews (the true Israel) in distinction to the natural nation of Israel
- the elected Gentiles in distinction to the Jews

### OUTLINE

#### Theme. God's election of people to righteousness (salvation)

The Bible speaks about Israel in the following terms:

The Bible speaks of Israel in national and in religious terms.

The Bible speaks of the election of Israel.

The Bible speaks of the adoption of Israel.

**(I) 9:1-5. God chose a nation (Israel) to whom he gave certain privileges**

- a. Paul's anguish about Israel's lot (9:1-3).
- b. The privileges of the natural nation of Israel (9:4-5).
- c. The limitations of Israel's privileges.

**(II) 9:6-18. God chose a remnant out of this nation to whom he granted salvation: the elect Jews.**

- a. The vindication of God's faithfulness (9:6-9).
- b. The vindication of God's election and calling (9:10-13).
- c. The vindication of God's justice and righteousness (9:14-18).

**(III) 9:19-29. God chooses a remnant out of every nation to whom he grants salvation: the elect from every nation.**

- a. God's sovereign will deals with showing mercy to his elect and not showing mercy to the rest (9:19-24).
- b. God's sovereign will deals with the call of Gentile believers (9:25-26).
- c. God's sovereign will deals with the salvation of the remnant of Jewish believers (9:27-29).

**(IV) 9:30-33. God chose a Rock (Jesus Christ) on whom he builds his people (the new community, the Church)**

### EXPLANATION

#### The Bible speaks about Israel in the following terms:

- a. The Bible speaks of Israel in national and in religious terms.

There are Jews and Christians today, who regard 'Israel' exclusively in ethnic, racial and nationalistic terms. They believe that the nation of Israel as a physical and national entity is 'God's people'. They also believe that God has a different plan of salvation for the physical nation of Israel than for all the other nations in the world.

However, a closer study of both the Old and New Testaments will show that all the writers in the Bible used the word 'Israel' in two senses: 'Israel' as the natural physical nation (the more inclusive term) and especially 'Israel' as the true and spiritual people of God (the more exclusive term). That is why Paul says, "Not all who are descended from Israel (the more inclusive term) are Israel (the more exclusive term)" (9:6).

**The view of the Old Testament prophets.** *The Old Testament prophets did not see 'Israel' primarily as a nationalistic entity, but as a religious entity! They regarded the true Israel in an exclusive sense. For them Israel is the community of those whose God is the LORD.* But those people in Israel who turned to idols<sup>1</sup> became "not my people"<sup>2</sup>.

The prophets looked at the true Israel as being the seven thousand whose knees have not bowed down to Baal<sup>3</sup> or as 'the survivors' or 'the remnant' whom the LORD has left for the nation of Israel<sup>4</sup>. While the majority of the nation of Israel would perish, only the remnant would be saved. In this way God would fulfil his promises to Israel.

Therefore, the term 'Israel' in the Old Testament is as elastic as the term 'Church' in the New Testament.

**The view of Jesus Christ.** Jesus clearly distinguished between Jews who would not inherit the Kingdom of God and Jews as well as Gentiles who would inherit the Kingdom of God<sup>5</sup>. He distinguished between disciples (who followed

<sup>1</sup> Hosea 2:8; 4:10-13; 8:4-6; 9:10; 10:1; 11:1-2

<sup>2</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 19:18

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-22; Jeremiah 50:20; Hosea 1:10; Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44

him on their own terms)<sup>6</sup> and true disciples (who followed him on his terms)<sup>7</sup>. And in contrast to the hypocritical Jews<sup>8</sup> Jesus called the Jew Nathanael a true Israelite<sup>9</sup>.

**The view of the New Testament apostles.** The apostle Paul makes this same distinction between *the physical nation of Israel* and *the spiritual nation of Israel*. He distinguishes between the Jews who have been circumcised by men in their outward flesh and the people who have been circumcised by the Holy Spirit in their inner hearts (2:28-29).

Not all 'the natural descendants of Abraham' are regarded as 'children of Abraham', because God's promise was made only to Isaac and not to Ishmael (9:7-9). Not even all 'the natural descendants of Isaac' are regarded as 'children of the promise', because God's promise was made to Jacob and not to Esau (9:10-13). Likewise, not all 'the natural descendants of Jacob' (the twelve tribes of Israel) are regarded as 'children of God' (9:27), because not all of them believed (9:32)<sup>10</sup>.

Paul distinguished between the son born in 'the ordinary way' (Ishmael) and 'the son born by the power of the Spirit' (Isaac) (cf. 9:7-9)<sup>11</sup>. He regarded the Gentile Christians in the congregations of Galatia as *children of promise* (cf. 9:8)<sup>12</sup> and as *the Israel of God* (cf. 9:6b)<sup>13</sup>, because they believed in Jesus Christ! The Jews as a natural and national nation is called *'Israel according to the flesh'*<sup>14</sup>. But the people who follow the rule of boasting in the cross of Jesus Christ, through which the sinful world was crucified to them and they to the sinful world, and who have become a new creation in Jesus Christ, are called *'the Israel of God'*<sup>15</sup>. Likewise here, Paul used the term 'Israel' first in the more inclusive sense as *the ethnic or natural nation of Israel* (9:6a) and then in the more restrictive sense as *the elect remnant within the nation of Israel* (9:6b). A part of natural Israel is the true Israel, but the true Israel is not coextensive with natural Israel!

The apostles Matthew, John and Peter had the same view<sup>16</sup>.

Conclusion. The prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ and the apostles of the New Testament clearly differentiate between Israel as the natural physical nation (the more inclusive term) and Israel as the true and spiritual people of God (the more exclusive term).

#### b. The Bible speaks of the election of Israel.

There are people who hold that Romans 9 speaks of election only in terms of collective nations and not of individuals. They therefore conclude that the whole natural nation of Israel had been elected.

However, even if the names 'Jacob' and 'Esau' in the Old Testament setting refer to nations in collective terms<sup>17</sup>, this does not mean that Paul is doing the same in the New Testament setting (9:13)! The whole context of Romans 9 deals with the ultimate destinies of individuals. It speaks of God's purpose working according to the election of individuals unto salvation.

**The election of Israel was an election of the whole nation of Israel.** It is true that the Old Testament speaks of the election of Israel as *the election of the whole nation*. It views the relationship of God to the people of Israel in a collective, inclusive and in a theocratic sense<sup>18</sup>. For example, Deuteronomy 10:15 says, "The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today." And Deuteronomy 14:2 says, "You are a people holy (set apart) to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen (elected) you to be *his treasured possession*<sup>19</sup>." But in this sense also all who live in the world (all the families of the nations) are *his possession*<sup>20</sup>. However, God chose Israel as 'his special possession'.

It is also true that God's promise to Rebecca in the Old Testament context contemplated more than the two individuals Esau and Jacob: "Two *nations* are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger"<sup>21</sup>. And Paul's quotation from the Old Testament also speaks of *the nations* of Israel and Edom, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated"<sup>22</sup>, not of *the individuals* Jacob and Esau as in Romans 9:13.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:57-62; John 6:60-66

<sup>7</sup> John 8:30-47

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 23:13-15; Luke 11:44

<sup>9</sup> John 1:47

<sup>10</sup> cf. Hebrews 4:1-2

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 4:29

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 4:28-29

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 6:16

<sup>14</sup> The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 10:18

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 6:14-16

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44; John 10:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:2-3

<sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy 4:37-38; 7:7-8; 10:15; 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; Psalm 33:12; 105:6,43; 135:4; Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:20-22; 44:1-2; 45:4; Amos 3:2

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 135:4,6

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 24:1; 22:27-28

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 25:23

<sup>22</sup> Malachi 1:2-3

However, the first question is *whether the election of Israel as a whole nation in the Old Testament was an election unto salvation or an election to something else*. And the second question is *whether Paul is speaking about the election of Israel as a whole nation or about the election of individuals in Romans 9:11b*.

**The election of the nation Israel was an election unto privileges.** Romans 9:4-5 speaks of the election of the whole nation of Israel *unto certain privileges during the whole Old Testament period*. The Israelites were adopted as “God’s children under age, guarded under the protection of the law” until the first coming of Christ<sup>23</sup>. However, their adoption did not mean that they were all saved (9:27)! *The election of the nation of Israel was not an election unto salvation, but was an election to be the place from where God would begin ‘his people’ on earth*. They were elected to be stewards of God’s covenant that consisted of God’s promises and God’s laws (cf. 3:1-2). They were elected to worship God visibly on earth and especially elected to bring forth Jesus Christ according to his human nature (9:5). They were elected to be God’s Old Testament covenant people<sup>24</sup>, but could be cut off from being God’s covenant people<sup>25</sup>.

**The election of the nation Israel was not an election unto salvation.** *Romans 9:6-33 clearly speaks of election unto salvation (justification)*. It speaks about the election of a remnant within the natural nation of Israel with a view to becoming the children of God (9:6-18; 8:16-17)<sup>26</sup>. It contrasts *the election of the objects of God’s wrath that are prepared for destruction* (9:19-22; cf. 11:7-10) with *the election of the objects of God’s mercy that are predestined for salvation*, for glory, that is, to be God’s beloved people<sup>27</sup> and sons of the living God (9:23-26)<sup>28</sup>. It clearly speaks of the election of the remnant of Israel unto salvation (9:27) and the election of Gentiles unto obtaining God’s righteousness (salvation) by faith (9:30).

Throughout God’s history of salvation, God’s discriminating, differentiating and determining criterion with respect to who are saved (who are the true children of God) is nothing less than God’s eternal will and grace expressed in his sovereign covenant promise (9:6-9), in his sovereign purpose working according to his election (9:10-13) and in his sovereign mercy (9:14-18).

Conclusion. Israel as a whole nation has only been elected unto certain privileges. The remnant of Israel is the true Israel that is elected unto salvation.

### c. The Bible speaks of the adoption of Israel.

Galatians 3:23 to 4:7 contrasts the nation of Israel of the Old Testament with the Christian Church of the New Testament. ‘Adoption’<sup>29</sup> is the father-child relationship between God and his children. There is a big difference between the adoption of Israel as God’s *children* during the Old Testament period and the adoption of Christians as God’s *sons* during the New Testament period. It has the same distinction as the Old Testament revelation as preparatory and the New Testament revelation as fully accomplished.

**The adoption of Israel during the Old Testament period was an adoption of God’s children under age.** Although other people who lived before Abraham also belong to God’s people<sup>30</sup>, Israel was called *the firstborn son of God*<sup>31</sup> because God had created (made, figuratively: fathered) Israel by means of a miracle from Abraham and Sarah<sup>32</sup>. This means that *Israel was formed to be the beginning of the community of God’s people (God’s children) on earth*. Because Israel was ‘God’s firstborn son’, God guarded Israel as ‘the apple of his eye’ and ‘caught and carried Israel as an eagle catches and carries its young’<sup>33</sup>. In contrast God killed the firstborn son of Pharaoh who arrogantly opposed God.

The Israelites were called ‘the children of God’ because God had *chosen* them out of all the nations on earth to be ‘his treasured possession’ and ‘a people set apart (holy)’ by God<sup>34</sup>.

But Israel was regarded as God’s children in the sense of *children under age* or *children under the protection and discipline of a guardian*, namely the Law of Moses<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 3:23 to 4:7

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 17:7

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 17:14; cf. Hosea 1:9

<sup>26</sup> cf. John 1:12-13

<sup>27</sup> cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>28</sup> Galatians 4:5-7; Ephesians 1:4-5

<sup>29</sup> G: huiiothesia

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-37; Hebrews 11:4-7

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 4:22-23

<sup>32</sup> Deuteronomy 32:6,18; Isaiah 45:11; 63:16; 64:8; cf. Romans 4:18-22; Hebrews 11:17-19

<sup>33</sup> Deuteronomy 32:11-12

<sup>34</sup> Deuteronomy 14:1-2

<sup>35</sup> Galatians 3:23-25; 4:1-7

God had reared the Israelites as his children, but nevertheless the majority of these children rebelled against him. They no longer knew God as their Master and Owner and had changed into ‘children given to corruption’<sup>36</sup>. Israel became unfaithful to God, so that God called her ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’ and despised her outward religion<sup>37</sup>. The more God called Israel, the further she strayed from God. Israel served idols<sup>38</sup> and even practised occultism<sup>39</sup>. Finally God called Israel ‘Lo ammi’, which means ‘Not my people’ and God was no longer their God<sup>40</sup>. This means that Israel had broken the covenant<sup>41</sup>. There was no more faith, love, faithfulness and obedience in Israel<sup>42</sup>. There was also no more honour and respect for God as their Creator<sup>43</sup>.

Nevertheless, God kept for himself a faithful remnant in Israel who did not bow before idols<sup>44</sup>.

**The adoption of Christians during the New Testament period is an adoption of God’s mature sons.** Before the creation of the world God had already predestined Christians (believers in Christ from the nation of Israel and from the Gentile nations) to be his sons and daughters<sup>45</sup>. After Christ’s completed work of salvation at his first coming Christians receive Christ by faith and receive the Spirit of adoption through whom they are able to call God ‘Father’ (8:15). Christians are the born-again children of God<sup>46</sup>.

But while the Israelites during the Old Testament period were called ‘*God’s children under age*’, the Christians during the New Testament period are called ‘*God’s mature or full-fledged sons*’. While the Israelites were God’s children in *the period of preparation*<sup>47</sup>, Christians from all the nations in the world are God’s sons and daughters in *the period of fulfilment*<sup>48</sup>. Their adoption was secured by Jesus Christ in the fullness of time (i.e. during the first coming of Christ)<sup>49</sup>.

During the New Testament period believers no longer need to pass through the period of preparation under the law, but are adopted as God’s mature sons (and daughters) on the ground of Christ’s completed work of salvation, which is accepted by faith. The grace that appears in the New Testament period is that people without distinction of race or social position are instated in the full blessing of sonship without having to undergo the stage of preparation under the supervision of the Law of Moses as Israel had to undergo. In short, *people should not first become Jews before they can become Christians*<sup>50</sup>.

### **(I) 9:1-5. God chose a nation (Israel) to whom he gave certain privileges.**

**9:1.** I am speaking (vipa) the truth in Christ - I am not lying (vipn). My conscience bears witness along (vppa) with me in the Holy Spirit

**9:2.** (when I say) that sorrow for me is (vipa) great and pain (anguish, smart) in my heart (is) unceasing.

**9:3.** For I was on the point of wishing<sup>51</sup> (viin) that I myself were (vnpa) accursed (cut off)<sup>52</sup> from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my fellow-countrymen according to the flesh (the Israelites)

**9:4.** since<sup>53</sup> they are (vipa) Israelites; of whom (is) the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the legislation (lawgiving) and the (temple) worship and the promises.

**9:5.** of whom (are) the patriarchs and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh (as far as his human nature is concerned), who is (vppa) over all God, blessed forever! Amen.

Why is Israel rejected as God’s people in spite of its election to privileges?

#### **a. Paul’s anguish about Israel’s lot.**

Paul’s genuine uprightness is confirmed by his conscience and God’s Spirit. The union with Christ is the source from which Paul’s emotions come and the sphere within which they move. Thus, ‘the truth’ derives its impulse from this union with Christ and this union with Christ guarantees the genuineness of this truth. The ‘conscience’ is the activity by which a person judges himself and brings his own conduct under moral and spiritual scrutiny. When the conscience

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<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 1:2-4

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 1:10-15

<sup>38</sup> Hosea 11:1-4

<sup>39</sup> Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Isaiah 8:19

<sup>40</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>41</sup> Jeremiah 31:32; Hebrews 8:7-9

<sup>42</sup> Hosea 4:1-6

<sup>43</sup> Malachi 1:6; 2:10

<sup>44</sup> 1 Kings 19:18

<sup>45</sup> Ephesians 1:5

<sup>46</sup> John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1

<sup>47</sup> Galatians 3:23-25; 4:1-3

<sup>48</sup> Galatians 3:26-29; 4:4-7

<sup>49</sup> Galatians 4:4-5

<sup>50</sup> cf. Acts 15:1

<sup>51</sup> G: euchomai

<sup>52</sup> G: anathema

<sup>53</sup> the relative pronoun ‘hostis’, plural ‘hoitines’: ‘who’ has here a causal meaning

approves, he has a good or pure conscience<sup>54</sup>. When it disapproves and convicts of sin, then he has a bad or guilty conscience<sup>55</sup>.

However, it is only as he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and lives in the Spirit, and only as his mind is governed by the Holy Spirit that he may be assured that the voice of conscience is in conformity with truth and right<sup>56</sup>. Here, the truth of the witness of Paul's conscience is certified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul has great sorrow and continual anguish in his heart with regard to the destiny of his own people, 'the Israelites'. They refer to the natural nation of Israel, the descendants of Jacob<sup>57</sup>.

Many Jews thought that Israel might be rejected, cursed and cut off from God's covenant promise. 'To be cursed (cut off)' means to be separated from Christ, to be devoted to destruction and to be abandoned to perdition. Paul does not say that he actually wishes or prays this, but hypothetically, if this were possible and would help towards the salvation of his fellow-countrymen, then he would be willing to make this sacrifice. It is a proof of his fervent love for them.

#### b. The privileges of the natural nation of Israel.

God had set the natural nation of Israel apart to know him, to serve him and to be his witnesses to other nations<sup>58</sup>. He had given Israel certain privileges and advantages above the Gentile nations<sup>59</sup>. But privileges are not the same as merits and advantages are not the same as virtues. The privileges were the following:

- 'The adoption of sons' is a term referring to Israel as God's firstborn son<sup>60</sup>, which means that Israel was *the beginning of God's people* as a community on earth, but not God's only people on earth.
- 'The divine glory' is a reference to *God's manifestation to them* in past history. It is a reference to the glory in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night<sup>61</sup>, the glory that appeared to them on Mount Sinai<sup>62</sup>, the glory that covered and filled the tabernacle<sup>63</sup>, the glory that appeared upon the mercy-seat in the holy of holies<sup>64</sup> and the glory that filled the temple<sup>65</sup>. God's glory is the radiance of his divine characteristics, like his holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, love, power, etc. God's glory was the sign of his presence with Israel and certified that God dwelt among them and met with them<sup>66</sup>.
- 'The covenants' in the plural is a reference to God's one covenant of grace, which he made with Abraham, and thereafter *reaffirmed again and again* during the Old Testament period<sup>67</sup>.
- 'The legislation' is a reference to *the moral, ceremonial and civil laws*, which Moses received<sup>68</sup>.
- 'The (temple) worship' is a reference to *the worship of the living God* in the tabernacle and temple during the Old Testament period and this set them apart from the worship of idols on every hill and under every tree<sup>69</sup>.
- 'The promises' is a reference to *the many specific promises* in the Old Testament revelation. The Israelites would become an uncountable large nation<sup>70</sup>. They would possess a great land<sup>71</sup>. The barren women would receive children<sup>72</sup>. With the help of God, they would do impossible things<sup>73</sup>. This includes the many promises about the coming Messiah<sup>74</sup>.
- 'The patriarchs' is a reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (4:1,11-12,16-17; 9:10; 15:8)<sup>75</sup>. Long before the laws were given to Moses<sup>76</sup>, the patriarchs had passed the words and deeds of the LORD on from generation to generation.

<sup>54</sup> Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:5,19; 3:9; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16,21

<sup>55</sup> John 8:9; Romans 2:15; Titus 1:15; Hebrews 10:22

<sup>56</sup> cf. 1 Timothy 1:19

<sup>57</sup> Genesis 32:28

<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 43:10,12

<sup>59</sup> Acts 13:16-23; Romans 3:1-2; 11:28; Ephesians 2:11-13

<sup>60</sup> Exodus 4:2 2-23; Hosea 11:1

<sup>61</sup> Exodus 13:21-22

<sup>62</sup> Exodus 24:16-17

<sup>63</sup> Exodus 40:34-38

<sup>64</sup> Leviticus 16:2

<sup>65</sup> 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; Ezekiel 1:28

<sup>66</sup> Exodus 29:42-46

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17-18; Exodus 2:24; 6:1-7; Deuteronomy 8:18; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 1:72-73; Acts 3:25; cf. promises,

Galatians 3:16-19; Ephesians 2:12

<sup>68</sup> Galatians 3:16-19

<sup>69</sup> Hebrews 9:1,6-10

<sup>70</sup> Genesis 15:6; cf. 1 Kings 4:20

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 15:18; cf. 1 Kings 4:21

<sup>72</sup> Genesis 18:10,14

<sup>73</sup> Psalm 18:29

<sup>74</sup> Galatians 3:16; cf. Romans 15:7

<sup>75</sup> Act.3:13,25

<sup>76</sup> Galatians 3:16-17

They include David<sup>77</sup> and probably all the forefathers of distinction in the history of salvation from Abraham onwards<sup>78</sup>. They are *the beginning of God's covenant people* on earth.

- **'From the Israelites is Christ according to the flesh'**. This is a reference to the many promises in the Old Testament concerning the coming Messiah. 'Messiah' is the Hebrew word for 'the Anointed' and 'Christ' is the Greek word for 'the Anointed'. These promises about the Messiah had not been given to any other natural nation on earth and were only fulfilled within the natural nation of Israel. All the other above mentioned privileges belonged to Israel, but *Jesus Christ did not belong to Israel. Only with respect to his human nature is Jesus Christ a descendant of the natural nation of Israel*<sup>79</sup>. But with respect to his divine nature, Jesus Christ does not belong to the natural nation of Israel, because he comes from God<sup>80</sup>. Jesus Christ is much more than just 'the flesh' (a human being with a body)<sup>81</sup>. Jesus Christ is God who, without letting go of his eternal divine nature, took on the human nature, entered his own creation and human history<sup>82</sup> in order that we human beings may become children of God and be transformed more and more into the likeness of God (8:29)<sup>83</sup>.

Thus Jesus Christ, as to his human nature, would come from the Jews<sup>84</sup> in order to make God and his love and mercy known to all the Gentile nations in the world (15:8-12)!

"Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever! Amen". The apostles Paul, Peter and John ascribe the title 'God'<sup>85</sup> to Christ<sup>86</sup>. Paul teaches that the Son is the very same nature as God and equal with God<sup>87</sup>. Everything that is involved in the predicate 'God' belongs to Christ! "In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form"<sup>88</sup>.

Paul usually uses the title 'God'<sup>89</sup> for the personal name of God the Father and the title 'Lord'<sup>90</sup> for Christ<sup>91</sup>. But in Philippians 2:6 he makes an exception and calls Christ 'God'. In 2 Corinthians 3:17 he makes another exception and calls Christ, 'the Spirit'. In Romans 9:5b Paul makes an appeal to Christ's sovereignty!

### c. The limitations of Israel's privileges.

Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:4-6 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 clearly teach that special privileges were given to Israel only until the first coming of Jesus Christ. *With the first coming of Christ, the believing Gentiles became heirs together with the believing Jews of all God's privileges and promises*<sup>92</sup>!

## **(II) 9:6-18. God chose a remnant out of this nation to whom he granted salvation: the elect Jews.**

### a. The vindication of God's faithfulness (9:6-9).

**9:6.** But it is not as though (such as, of what sort as)<sup>93</sup> the word of God had failed (literally: had fallen from its place)<sup>94</sup> (vira). For not all (who are) of Israel (are) Israel.

**9:7.** Nor because they are (vipa) Abraham's seed (descendants)<sup>95</sup> (are) they all (his) children<sup>96</sup>. On the contrary, "It is in (through) Isaac offspring/descendants will be reckoned (literally: called, named)<sup>97</sup> (vifp)".

**9:8.** This means (vipa), (it is) not the children of the flesh (the natural children) who (are) children of God, but (it is) the children of the promise who are reckoned (counted, regarded)<sup>98</sup> (vipp) as seed (offspring).

**9:9.** For the word of the promise is this: "At the appointed time I will return<sup>99</sup> (vifd), and there will be (vifd) a son for Sarah".

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<sup>77</sup> Mark 11:10

<sup>78</sup> Hebrews 1:1

<sup>79</sup> Galatians 4:4

<sup>80</sup> John 3:13,31

<sup>81</sup> John 1:1,14; Romans 1:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7

<sup>82</sup> John 1:1,14; Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>83</sup> Philippians 3:8-21

<sup>84</sup> John 4:22; cf. Genesis 22:18; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Isaiah 2:3-4; 7:14; 9:2,6-7; 11:1-10; 42:6-7; 49:6; 52:13-53:12; Daniel 2:44-46

<sup>85</sup> G: ho theos

<sup>86</sup> John 1:1; Romans 9:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; John 1:1; 20:28

<sup>87</sup> Philippians 2:6; cf. Colossians 2:9

<sup>88</sup> Philippians 2:6; cf. Colossians 2:9

<sup>89</sup> G: ho theos

<sup>90</sup> G: ho kurios

<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:6

<sup>92</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20; Ephesians 3:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>93</sup> G: hoios, a relative pronoun

<sup>94</sup> G: ekpiptó

<sup>95</sup> G: sperma

<sup>96</sup> G: tekna

<sup>97</sup> G: kaleó

<sup>98</sup> G: logizomai

<sup>99</sup> G: erchomai, eleusomai, élthon

People do not become the children of God by birth or natural descent. They become the children of God only through God's sovereign promise (9:6-9)!

Romans 9:6-13 deals with God's faithfulness. Because many Jews had rejected Jesus Christ, some people concluded that God had been unfaithful to his covenant promise. 'The word of God' here refers to God's sovereign covenant promise (cf. 9:4). *A covenant in the Bible is equal to a promise bound by an oath.* Paul says that the unbelief of the natural nation of Israel and their consequent rejection by God does not mean that God's covenant promise to Israel had failed! God's covenant promise was never intended for every single Jew of the nation of Israel, but was realised in those Jews whom God had elected by grace and who consequently believed (and obeyed).

God's covenant promise with the patriarchs did not fail, because it was not realised through physical Israel (9:6a), but through spiritual Israel (9:6b). It was not realised through natural descent (9:8), but through God's purpose in election (9:11). It was not realised through the human will or effort (9:16a), but through God's sovereign mercy (9:16b). The distinguishing and determining principle is God's purpose in election. God had elected the whole nation of Israel to enjoy certain privileges, but he had only elected a part of them unto salvation!



**God did not regard the whole nation of Israel as his chosen people (9:6).** In the Bible the words ‘Israel’, ‘seed’ or ‘descendants’ and ‘children’ are used in both a more general and inclusive sense and also in a more restricted and exclusive sense. The more *inclusive* sense is determined by natural descent, but the *exclusive* sense is determined by God’s sovereign promise, God’s sovereign purpose in election and calling and God’s sovereign mercy!

God does not regard all the people that belong to the natural nation of Israel (the more inclusive sense)(9:6a) as belonging to the genuine Israel (the exclusive sense)(9:6b). The natural nation of Israel consisted mainly of Jews, the twelve tribes that descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. Certain Canaanites (the Gibeonites)<sup>100</sup>, Moabites<sup>101</sup> as well as aliens from the other Gentile nations<sup>102</sup> joined the natural nation of Israel. While God did not regard the natural Jews who worshipped idols as his people<sup>103</sup>, he did regard natural Gentiles who believed in him as his people<sup>104</sup>! Therefore, during the Old Testament period God did not regard all natural Jews as his chosen people.

The purpose of this distinction in Romans 9:6 is to show that the covenant promise of God did not have reference to the natural nation of Israel, ‘Israel according to the flesh’<sup>105</sup>, but to the true Israel, ‘the Israel of God’<sup>106</sup>. Therefore the unbelief and rejection of the natural nation of Israel as a whole in no way interfered with the fulfilment of God’s covenant purpose and promise to the spiritual nation of Israel. God’s covenant promise had not been violated! The point of this emphasis is that *the covenant is not realised through the natural nation of Israel (those only elected to certain privileges), but through the spiritual or true Israel (those elected to salvation). The true Israel consists only of believers*<sup>107</sup>.

**God did not make his covenant promise with every single individual in Israel (9:7-9).** Not all Abraham’s physical descendants are ‘Abraham’s children’. Paul clearly distinguishes between Abraham’s ‘seed (descendants), who are the natural nation of Israel, and Abraham’s children, who are the true Israel or God’s children (9:8).

“In Isaac shall your seed be called” is a quotation from Genesis 21:12. “Through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned.” The reference to ‘seed’ or ‘offspring’ (9:7b) is not made to *Isaac’s descendants*, but to *Isaac himself* as ‘the son of the promise’. The word ‘Isaac’ must therefore refer to the individual called Isaac and not to the collective called Israel! The thought is focused on the choice of the individual Isaac in contrast with the individual Ishmael.

However, even if the word ‘seed’ (9:7b) is taken collectively (as in 9:7a), then ‘the collective seed’ are not all those descended from Isaac, the natural descendants, but those ‘of Isaac’, those who like Isaac are ‘children of the promise’ (9:8)!

God did not make his covenant promise with the whole natural nation of Israel, but only with individuals like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God made his sovereign promise only with those he chose. The covenant promise took effect in their lives. They believed<sup>108</sup>. But the other people did not believe<sup>109</sup>.

God made his covenant promise to Abraham<sup>110</sup>, but this promise did not take effect in all Abraham’s natural descendants. For example, God chose the individual Isaac and not the individual Ishmael. God repeated his covenant promise to Isaac<sup>111</sup>, but this promise did not take effect in all Isaac’s descendants. For example, God chose the individual Jacob and not the individual Esau. *God then repeated his covenant promise to Jacob*<sup>112</sup>, *but this promise did not take effect in all Jacob’s descendants (the Jews)*. For example, although the number of the natural descendants of Jacob was like the sand by the sea, God chose only the remnant and only they obtained righteousness (salvation)<sup>113</sup>.

Note the word ‘reckon’<sup>114</sup> in Romans 4:3. God does not reckon (regard) the natural children as children of God. The natural children of Abraham are reckoned as ‘children of the flesh’ (only physical descendants). Only the children of God’s promise to Abraham are reckoned as ‘children of God’. God’s covenant promises have reference, not to people who are only born in the natural way, but to people who are born-again by God’s Spirit. The identity of these people, in whom God’s covenant promises are being fulfilled, are those who are brought into an adoptive relation to God: *they are*

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<sup>100</sup> Joshua 9

<sup>101</sup> Ruth

<sup>102</sup> Isaiah 56:1-8

<sup>103</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>104</sup> Isaiah 56:3-8; cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:18

<sup>106</sup> Galatians 6:16

<sup>107</sup> Galatians 6:14-16; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>108</sup> Genesis 15:6

<sup>109</sup> Isaiah 53:1; Romans 10:16; Hebrews 4:2

<sup>110</sup> Genesis 17:7; 22:17-18

<sup>111</sup> Genesis 26:3-5

<sup>112</sup> Genesis 28:13-15

<sup>113</sup> Isaiah 10:20-22; Romans 9:27

<sup>114</sup> G: logizomai



called 'children of God', the same term Paul used in Romans 8:16-17,21 and Philippians 2:15 of born-again Christians<sup>115</sup>!

'The promise' is the one given to Abraham in Genesis 18:10,14. Abraham attached his faith to this promise (4:19-21). In the case of Ishmael there was no such promise. Ishmael was begotten, conceived and born in the natural way, 'a natural child'. But Isaac was 'a child of promise'.

This same differentiation is made between 'the natural nation of Israel' (9:6a) and 'the true (spiritual) Israel' (9:6b); between 'Abraham's seed (descendants)' and 'Abraham's children' (9:7); between 'the children of the flesh' and 'the children of God' (9:8); and between 'the natural seed (offspring)' and 'the true seed (offspring)' (9:7,8). The specific difference between the more inclusive and the more restrictive use of the various terms 'Israel', 'seed' and 'children' is in each case defined by what is implicit in God's covenant promise. *'The seed' whom God's promise had in view are those people in whom God's promise takes effect!* The principle of differentiation is God's sovereign promise, which is an expression of his sovereign will and grace.

**Conclusion 1.** People do not become the children of God by birth or natural descent. They become the children of God only through God's sovereign promise!

**b. The vindication of God's election and calling (9:10-13).**

**9:10.** And not only this; but also Rebekah conceived (her two sons)(i.e. she had sexual relations with, shared the marriage-bed with)<sup>116</sup> (vppa) at one time by one and the same husband<sup>117</sup>, namely, our father Isaac.

**9:11.** For, when they (the twins) had not yet been born (vpap) and had not yet done (vpaa) anything good or bad, in order that God's electing purpose<sup>118</sup> might continuously remain (stand, persist, last)(vspa):

**9:12.** (God's purpose in election was based) not on (human) works, but on him who calls (vppa), it was said<sup>119</sup> (viap) to her: "The older will serve (vifa) the younger."

**9:13.** Just as it is written (virp): "Jacob I once for all loved (viaa), but Esau I once for all hated (viaa)."

People do not become the children of God by their human works. They become the children of God only through God's sovereign election, that is, through God's sovereign love, and through God's sovereign call, which is always effective (9:10-13)!

Paul delineates a second differentiation in the history of the patriarchs: God 'loved' Jacob and 'hated' Esau. After the first differentiation in Romans 9:6-9, Jews could still say that God's promise is guaranteed to all Isaac's seed without distinction. However Paul shows that the differentiation continues in Isaac's family. Esau and Jacob had the same father and mother, were even begotten, conceived and born at the same time (their physical development was concurrent) and moreover, Esau was the firstborn of the twins (9:12)! And still God chose Jacob, counter to human tradition and expectation.

Even more noteworthy was the fact that God's discrimination was uttered before the children were born and before they had done anything good or evil! The discrimination was completely sovereign! The election was not based on their works, but on the sovereign call of God (9:12).

God's purpose in election is expressed to Rebecca in Genesis 25:23, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." Romans 9:10-13 was one application of God's electing purpose. God's electing purpose is unchangeable, expressed by the word 'might continuously remain'. The present tense expresses an abiding condition.

Does Paul understand the words: "God's purpose according to election" in terms of the whole nation for salvation or in terms of individuals for salvation? There are two views. The second view is correct.

- The first view is that God's electing purpose is not of individuals but of *Israel as a nation*. It says that God is not thinking of individuals, but of collectives. It assumes that Paul presupposes this election of Israel as a collective people also in Romans 9:11b. It believes that human relationships and the relationship of God to men are governed by *the principle of solidarity*. In the history of salvation the election of Jacob and the rejection of Esau must have had radical bearing upon their respective descendants<sup>120</sup>! The election of such an important person in the history of salvation, as Jacob was, cannot have any other sequel than the election of Israel as a nation! However, this view is refuted by verse 6.
- The second view is that God's electing purpose is with respect to the ultimate destinies of *individuals*. It says that God is not thinking of collectives, but of individuals. It proves that Paul is speaking about the election of individuals and not of a whole nation for salvation in Romans 9:11b.

**The electing purpose of God is his sovereign will to save certain people.**

<sup>115</sup> cf. John 1:12-13; Romans 2:28-29

<sup>116</sup> G: koitén echo

<sup>117</sup> G: ex henos

<sup>118</sup> G: hé kat elogén prothesis tou theou mené,

<sup>119</sup> G: legó, eró. eipon, eiréka)(erréthé is first aorist passive

<sup>120</sup> This would mean that no Edomite could ever be saved! *But note Romans 10:13 and Revelation 5:9! People are saved from every nation!*

- **Foreknowledge, election and purpose.** God's foreknowledge<sup>121</sup> (8:29)<sup>122</sup> is that he knew from eternity with distinguishing love the people he would save. God's eternal foreknowledge is expressed in his eternal election (of people)<sup>123</sup> <sup>124</sup> and in his eternal purpose (plan for people)<sup>125</sup> (8:28)<sup>126</sup>. The purpose of God is "according to election"; thus grammatically, 'election' is prior to 'purpose'. God's purpose springs from God's election and fulfils the design of God's election. The whole expression means 'electing purpose': *God's purpose is characterised by God's election or God's election has determinative purpose!* God's sovereign and determinative will works according to his election unto salvation! God's foreknowledge, election and purpose *before the beginning of time is worked out in time* (in human history) through his effective calling<sup>127</sup> of people to salvation (8:30,33; 9:11-13)<sup>128</sup>.
- **Election of individuals to salvation.** God's election has the determinative purpose to save certain people. The Bible says the following: The people God foreknew and predestined, he also called and justified (saved) (8:29-30). The people God chose, he justified (saved) (8:33). "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through believe in the truth<sup>129</sup>." God saved Christians because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave to them in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time<sup>130</sup>.

In the New Testament, the term 'election'<sup>131</sup> always refers to the election of individuals unto salvation<sup>132</sup>. The term 'the elect or chosen'<sup>133</sup> always refers to the election of individuals unto salvation<sup>134</sup>. The only exception refers to the elect angels<sup>135</sup>. And the verb 'to elect'<sup>136</sup> refers unmistakably to election unto salvation<sup>137</sup>. Therefore, in the Bible, the term in all its forms refers unmistakably to election unto salvation of believers and makes it indefensible to understand the word 'election' in another sense unless there is a compelling contextual reason!

*Therefore, 'election' is God's eternal purpose to save some people of the human race in and by Jesus Christ.* 'The elect' are those people whom God knew (cf. 8:29)<sup>138</sup> from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight, those whom he loved beforehand, those he chose (elected, selected) beforehand. Those God elected before the beginning of history he also effectively calls within history (8:30; 9:11). Before the creation of the world<sup>139</sup> God *once-for-all time*<sup>140</sup> chose (elected) for himself certain people out of all people in the world. He gave them to Jesus Christ<sup>141</sup> and drew them to himself or to Jesus Christ<sup>142</sup>. Jesus Christ knows those whom he has chosen<sup>143</sup>.

**The electing purpose of God unto salvation is not the same as God's collective, inclusive, theocratic election of Israel.** *If the electing purpose of God unto salvation was meant to be understood as God's collective, inclusive, theocratic election of the natural (ethnic) nation of Israel, Paul could not have stated that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (9:6)!* He is precisely saying, "Not all people of the natural nation Israel (9:6a) are elected unto salvation" (9:6b)! Paul clearly distinguishes between the election of the natural nation Israel unto privileges and the election of the true individual children of God unto salvation! Thus, the electing purpose of God in a discriminating, differentiating sense cannot apply to all who were embraced in the theocratic election of the natural nation of Israel.

**The electing purpose of God unto salvation has reference only to a remnant in Israel and not to the whole natural nation of Israel.** In Romans 11:5, Paul says, "So also, at the present time, there is a remnant elected by grace". And he says, "The elect obtained righteousness by faith, while the rest were hardened" (9:31-32; 11:7). Thus, 'the remnant' refers to the elect who obtained salvation, while the others did not obtain salvation. *Paul clearly refers to the*

<sup>121</sup> G: prognósis

<sup>122</sup> 1 Peter 1:1-2

<sup>123</sup> G: eklogé

<sup>124</sup> Jeremiah 31:3a; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1-2

<sup>125</sup> G: prothesis

<sup>126</sup> Ephesians 1:4-5,9-11; 3:10-11; Hebrews 7:17

<sup>127</sup> G: klésis

<sup>128</sup> Jeremiah 31:3b; Hosea 11:4; John 6:44; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-11; 1 Peter 1:1-2,19-20; 2 Peter 1:3-4

<sup>129</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:13

<sup>130</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9; cf. Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11; 3:11

<sup>131</sup> G: eklogé

<sup>132</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9; cf. Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11; 3:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10

<sup>133</sup> G: eklektos

<sup>134</sup> Matthew 22:14; 24:22,24,31; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9; Revelation 17:14

<sup>135</sup> 1 Timothy 5:21; cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:3

<sup>136</sup> G: eklegomai

<sup>137</sup> Ephesians 1:4; James 2:5

<sup>138</sup> 1 Peter 1:1-2

<sup>139</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>140</sup> aorist tense

<sup>141</sup> John 6:37,39; 17: 2,6,9,24

<sup>142</sup> John 6:37,44,65

<sup>143</sup> John 13:18; 15:16,19; cf. 2 Timothy 2:19

election of only a remnant in Israel, because the others in Israel were hardened. Israel as a whole nation was not elected unto salvation.

**The electing purpose of God unto salvation operates only by God's sovereign call and not by human works (9:12).**

Whenever Paul uses the word 'to call'<sup>144</sup> of God with respect to salvation, then it is always God's effectual call unto salvation (8:30; 9:12,24)<sup>145</sup> and not simply his external call or historic invitation by the proclamation of the gospel<sup>146</sup>.

The same is true of the noun 'calling'<sup>147</sup> and the adjective 'called'<sup>148</sup> (1:6-7; 8:28; 11:29)<sup>149</sup>. God's electing purpose before the beginning of time is expressed in time through his sovereign call unto salvation and this call is always effective. God alone is the One who calls people effectively unto salvation. Even when a preacher calls people unto salvation through the proclamation of the gospel, it will only be effective when God calls those people through his Holy Spirit in their minds and hearts<sup>150</sup>.

God's electing purpose of people unto salvation is not determined by their effort doing good (religious) works<sup>151</sup> or by their own (free) will by which they choose to follow Jesus Christ (9:11-12,16; cf. 8:7-8)! God's electing purpose of people unto salvation is determined only by God's sovereign will<sup>152</sup>, is expressed in God's sovereign call unto salvation (1:6-7; 8:30)<sup>153</sup> and is brought about by God's sovereign regeneration in the mind and heart (2:29)<sup>154</sup>! This call is always effective! The true Church<sup>155 156</sup> is then 'the people God effectively called out of the world to be his own people'.

**The electing purpose of God unto salvation affects his love for the individual Jacob (9:13).**

- Jacob and Esau in the Old Testament. God had said, "The older (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob)" (9:12) and "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated". These are quotations from the Old Testament<sup>157</sup> and in the Old Testament they clearly refer to the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom. "The LORD chose Israel to be his treasured possession", ... but "struck down many nations"<sup>158</sup>.
- To love and to hate. The words 'to hate' in the Bible does not always have the same negative meaning as in English. It can have the meaning of 'to love less' or 'to regard and treat with less favour'<sup>159</sup>. Thus, Esau was not the object of that love God had for Jacob. But in the context of Malachi 1:2-5 the words 'to hate' rather point in the direction of the meaning 'to regard and treat with disfavour', 'to judge' and 'to reject'.
- The land of Edom. Because the nation of Edom had helped Nebuchadnezzar in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to destroy the nation of Israel and had tried to take possession of the land of Israel<sup>160</sup> they remained under the wrath of God. God's wrath towards Esau was not expressed in subjectively hating Esau, but rather in objectively tearing down whatever Edom had built up and turning the land of Edom into a wasteland, leaving it empty with no people to inherit. God's 'hatred' (disfavour) towards Esau is not merely expressed in the absence of his blessings, but in positive judgements<sup>161</sup>.
- God's 'hatred' has no human analogy. We should not predicate to it all the unworthy features which belong to hate as it is exercised by sinful human beings. *In God's hatred (disfavour, disapproval and displeasure) there is no malice, malignity, vindictiveness, unholy rancour or bitterness.* However there are other elements in human hatred that reflect God's hatred. For example: holy jealousy for God's honour as an expression of their love for God<sup>162</sup> reflects in humans God's holy jealousy for his own honour! There is therefore in God *a holy hatred* which cannot be defined in terms of 'not loving' or 'loving less'. It is a hatred that belongs to the transcendent realm of God's sovereignty for which there is no human analogy.

**Jacob and Esau in the New Testament.**

- God's promise became effective in individuals. In the New Testament (chapter 9) these quotations cannot refer to nations, but must refer to individuals. Because God's promise with respect to justification and eternal life (salvation)

<sup>144</sup> G: kaleomai

<sup>145</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 1:15; 5:13; Ephesians 4:1,4; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>146</sup> Matthew 22:14

<sup>147</sup> G: klésis

<sup>148</sup> G: klétos

<sup>149</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2,24,26; Ephesians 1:18; 4:1,4; Philippians 3:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1; 2 Peter 1:10

<sup>150</sup> John 16:8-10; Acts 15:8-9; 16:14

<sup>151</sup> cf. Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>152</sup> Ephesians 1:5,11; Philippians 2:13

<sup>153</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Jude 1:1; Revelation 17:14

<sup>154</sup> John 1:13

<sup>155</sup> G: ekklésia < ek + kaleó, out + called

<sup>156</sup> Psalm 22:22; Matthew 16:18

<sup>157</sup> Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2-5

<sup>158</sup> Psalm 135:4,10

<sup>159</sup> Matthew 6:24; 10:37-38; Luke 14:26; John 12:25

<sup>160</sup> Ezekiel 35:5,10

<sup>161</sup> Psalm 5:5-6; 11:5-6; Proverbs 6:12-19; Isaiah 1:14-15; Jeremiah 44:3-6; Hosea 9:15; Amos 5:21-27

<sup>162</sup> Psalm 26:5; 31:6; 139:21-22; Jude 23, Revelation 2:6

became effective first and foremost in the individual Isaac and not in the individual Ishmael, his electing purpose and call with respect to salvation as an expression of his love must be considered as first and foremost becoming effective in the individual Jacob and not in the individual Esau!

‘Jacob’ refers to the individual who God elected to salvation according to his purpose and ‘Esau’ refers to the individual who God did not elect to salvation according to his purpose. *If Jacob and Esau had referred to nations, then they could not explain the unbelief and apostasy of so many individuals in the nation of Israel! Then they could also not explain the difference between the two words ‘Israel’ in Romans 9:6. And then the notion that the whole natural nation of Israel is elected for salvation would contradict Romans 9:27 and 29, which say that ‘only a remnant of Israel would be saved’! And then it would also mean that not a single individual in the nation of Edom could or would be saved!*

Because God’s revelation of his plan of salvation for individuals was not yet completed during the Old Testament period, these Old Testament quotations in their Old Testament context do not reveal God’s discriminating and differentiating criterion with respect to who would be the true children of God as the New Testament does. The New Testament revelation clearly states that *not* all individuals who belong to the natural nation of Israel are elected to be saved (e.g. Esau). Likewise, the New Testament revelation clearly states that *not* all individuals who belong to the natural nation of Edom are rejected to go lost<sup>163</sup>.

Moreover, although God chose individuals like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he rejected many of their descendants, who did not believe. And although God did not choose an individual like Esau, many of his descendants were chosen and saved, because they believed. Thus, God’s covenant promise is realised in individuals that believe (Galatians 3:6-14).

The fact that many individual Jews within the nation of Israel did not believe in Jesus Christ, does not mean that God’s covenant promise to Israel had failed, because *God’s covenant promise never had respect to every single Jew of the nation Israel, but was realised only in those individual Jews whom God elected by grace to be saved*, like for example the individuals Isaac and Jacob. People do not become the children of God by their human works (whether moral good works of God’s moral law or religious works of God’s ceremonial law). They become the children of God only through God’s sovereign election, that is, through God’s sovereign love, and through God’s sovereign call, which is always effective!

- The tense of the verbs ‘to love’ and ‘to hate’ (aorist active). They both point to *once for all* actions towards the individuals Jacob and Esau and not to continuous or repeated actions in history towards the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom.
- The meaning of to love and to hate. In the New Testament (9:13b) ‘Esau’ refers to the individual, the brother of Jacob. God’s ‘love’ for Jacob and his ‘hatred’ for Esau is not caused by any character differences in the two children. They are *expressions of God’s sovereign will with respect to the ultimate destinies of Jacob and Esau. They are another way of expressing God’s electing purpose: God preferred the individual Jacob, that is, chose him, but did not prefer the individual Esau, that is, did not choose him. His ‘love’ is here another expression for his electing purpose to salvation, while his ‘hatred’ is here another expression of for his electing purpose to harden (11:7-10) unto destruction (9:22)*. God did this to show to believers that *they are God’s children, because God chose them and not because they chose God*<sup>164</sup>!

Conclusion 2. People do not become the children of God by good works. They become the children of God only through God’s sovereign electing purpose! God’s sovereign elective purpose is concerned with the ultimate destinies of individuals! However difficult it may be for believers today to understand God’s election, they must submit their thinking (beliefs, doctrine) and feelings to the fact that the secret (hidden, not revealed) things belong to the LORD our God<sup>165</sup> and that God’s thoughts are not human thoughts and his ways are not human ways<sup>166</sup>.

The doctrine of election is not an invention of any particular theologian or denomination. It is a direct teaching from the Lord Jesus Christ himself<sup>167</sup> and from the apostle Paul himself (8:29-30,34; 9:6-33; 11:4-10)<sup>168</sup>. And Jesus Christ warns everyone who takes words away from his revelation in the Bible that God would take away from them their share in eternity<sup>169</sup>.

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<sup>163</sup> cf. Revelation 5:9

<sup>164</sup> cf. John 15:16

<sup>165</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29

<sup>166</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>167</sup> John 6:37,39,44; 13:18; 15:16,19; 17:2,9,24

<sup>168</sup> Ephesians 1:4-5; Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 2:19

<sup>169</sup> cf. Revelation 22:18-19

### c. The vindication of God's justice and righteousness (9:14-18)?

**9:14.** What then shall we say<sup>170</sup> (vifa)? (Is) there<sup>171</sup> injustice on God's part? May (this) not be (voad) (i.e. Not at all)!

**9:15.** For he says (vipa) to Moses, "I will *certainly* have mercy (vifa) on whom I have mercy (vspa), and I will *certainly* have compassion (vifa) on whom I have compassion (vspa)."

**9:16.** So then (consequently)<sup>172</sup>, (it does) not depend on (literally: not from) a man *constantly* exercising his will (expressing purpose, resolve)<sup>173</sup> (vppa) or on a man *constantly* exerting himself to his limit (running, making an effort)<sup>174</sup> (vppa), but on God *again and again* showing mercy<sup>175</sup> (vppa).

**9:17.** For the Scripture says (vipa) to Pharaoh: "For this very purpose<sup>176</sup> I *once for all* raised you up (viaa), in order that<sup>177</sup> I might display (vsam) in you my power and in order that I might proclaim (vsap) my name in all the earth."

**9:18.** So then, on whom he (God) wills (determines: expressing purpose and resolve)<sup>178</sup> (vipa) he has mercy (vipa), and whom he wills (determines: expressing purpose and resolve)<sup>179</sup> (vipa) he hardens<sup>180</sup> (vipa).

People do not become the children of God by their own desire (free will, decision, and determination) or effort (religious good works). They become the children of God only through God's elective purpose and sovereign grace (mercy, compassion) (9:14-18)!

**The sovereign God is free to show mercy (give grace) to whomever he wants (9:14-16).** There are always some people who accuse God of being unjust, because the sovereign God determines who will become his children and who will not. These people value their individual human freedom and self-determination (the so-called 'free will of man') above God's sovereign free will to execute his eternal plan.

**We can only speak of 'justice' when someone can make a just claim.** Justice presupposes rightful claims. God's righteousness is vindicated by the fact that *no man can make a just claim with God*. Paul defends God's justice (when he saves whomever he wants to save) with the argument that *no one can make a legitimate claim that God should save him*. Because no one has any rightful claim with God, no one can make any just claim against God! No Jew or Gentile can demand salvation or sonship from God as his due or property.

For example. If God regarded all people on earth as born in complete innocence (as some religions and humanism claim), these people would all stand on the zero line between salvation and damnation (good and evil) at the beginning of their lives. Then they with their complete free would be able to determine themselves whether they choose God and his salvation or choose damnation. If God would then choose some people on earth for salvation and not the others, his election would be completely arbitrary and he would be completely unjust! Only then could people make a just claim against God!

However, because all people are descendants of Adam, have *once for all* sinned through Adam (5:12) and have been born with a sinful nature<sup>181</sup>, *all people* have sinned and fall short of God's divine requirements (3:10-12,23)<sup>182</sup>. Because all people already stand far below the zero line between salvation and damnation, not a single human being has the ability to choose or determine whether he be saved or condemned. God regards all natural people on earth as sinners, ungodly and enemies (5:6,8,10). All people have already fallen together with the whole human race (5:12,17-19). All people are already lost, condemned and subject to God's wrath<sup>183</sup>. No one on earth can make a just claim! Therefore, even if God would condemn all the people on earth and not save one single person, he would still be completely and perfectly (100%) just!

Moreover, the only free will God had ever given to man was *before* the fall of man in sin<sup>184</sup>. *After the fall into sin no man has a free will to choose salvation, because not a single natural man submits to God's will, nor is he able to submit to God's will or please God in any way (8:7-8)! And finally, no one chooses Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ chooses those who will belong to him<sup>185</sup>.*

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<sup>170</sup> G: legó, eró, eipon

<sup>171</sup> G: 'me' + question expects a strong negation

<sup>172</sup> G: ara oun

<sup>173</sup> G: theló

<sup>174</sup> G: trechó

<sup>175</sup> G: eleeó

<sup>176</sup> G: eis auto touto

<sup>177</sup> G: hopós

<sup>178</sup> G: theló

<sup>179</sup> G: theló

<sup>180</sup> G: sklérunó

<sup>181</sup> Psalm 51:5; Job 14:4; 15:14

<sup>182</sup> Psalm 14:2-3

<sup>183</sup> Psalm 5:4-5; John 3:18,36

<sup>184</sup> Genesis 2:15-17

<sup>185</sup> John 15:16; cf. Luke 19:10

**We can only speak of ‘mercy (grace)’ when someone cannot make a just claim.** Exodus 33 describes God’s response to the nation of Israel after they had made a golden calf as idol to replace God! God threatened to blot the names of the sinners out of his book<sup>186</sup>, but Moses pleaded on behalf of Israel that God would have mercy on Israel. Moses was anxious that the nation of Israel should find favour in God’s eyes and that God’s Presence would prove that Israel were God’s people separated from all other people on the face of the earth<sup>187</sup>. But God said to Moses, “I will have mercy *on whomsoever* I have mercy, and I will have compassion *on whomsoever* I have compassion”<sup>188</sup>. God had all the right in the world to punish Israel by rejection, hardening and final perdition! Israel fully deserved it. Moses and Israel could lay no claim to any favour from God!

The matter had altogether become one of God’s sovereign mercy, that is, his sovereign free choice to bestow mercy or not to bestow mercy! There is no need to distinguish between ‘mercy’<sup>189</sup> and ‘compassion’<sup>190</sup>. The quotation emphasises the reality, effectiveness and security of God’s favour which God expressed in terms of his mercy and his compassion. The ‘on whomsoever’ accentuates God’s free and sovereign choice. God’s mercy and compassion is not a matter of justice to those who become partakers of it, but altogether a matter of his sovereign and free grace! This is true whether God’s mercy is directed to the theocratic election of the nation of Israel to covenant privileges, or whether God’s mercy is directed to the election of individuals unto salvation, which is Paul’s particular concern here.

*‘Justice’ presupposes rightful claims. But ‘mercy’ can be operative only where no claim of justice exists! Grace or mercy is God’s free gift, which no one deserves! Since God’s mercy is the only constraining consideration left, God’s mercy must be understood as God’s free and sovereign determination. God has mercy on whomsoever he wills! This is the emphasis in Exodus 33 and in Romans 9. God has the perfect right not to save a single person. Even if God would not save a single person he would still be perfectly righteous and just! The fact that God nevertheless saves an uncountable great number of unrighteous and completely unworthy people on earth<sup>191</sup> is because God’s love goes far beyond God’s justice! God’s mercy triumphs over God’s judgement<sup>192</sup>!*

Man’s ‘will’ consists of his choices, decisions and determinations. Man’s ‘effort’ consists of his running, his strenuous exertion to the limit of his powers in an attempt to go forward<sup>193</sup>. The election of God and consequently obtaining God’s favour is never a matter of a man’s will (purpose) or his wish (desire) or his effort (action)! God’s mercy is God’s free and sovereign bestowal of his grace!

**The sovereign God is free to harden whomever he wants (9:17-18).** Although God’s sovereign will and determination to show mercy to some people (9:14-16) and to harden other people (9:17-18), will always remain a deep mystery for people, God’s hardening of some people presupposes the fact that those people fully deserve that punishment.

**Human guilt and hardening.** The hardening of which the Bible speaks is a *judicial* concept: it presupposes the fact that the people in view are worthy of condemnation and deserve punishment. In all the cases here below, the peoples’ self-hardening deserves punishment! We may never define hardening apart from human guilt!

In the case of Pharaoh. There is no question about the fact that he hardened his own heart against God and God’s words<sup>194</sup>. But the Old Testament also clearly teaches that Pharaoh hardened his heart because God hardened his heart<sup>195</sup>. Paul uses the same term as used in the Greek Old Testament<sup>196</sup>: God hardens those people whom he wants to harden (9:18). Therefore, because both the Old Testament and the New Testament emphasise that it is God who hardens people, it would not be proper to say that God *only permitted him* or *allowed him* to harden his heart.

The context of Romans 9 is concerned with God’s sovereign and determinative will and action. God makes a sovereign promise with respect to Isaac and Jacob: that God chose them to be his children. And he makes a sovereign statement with respect to the king of Egypt, Pharaoh: that God chose him to harden his heart. Therefore the parallel between God’s determinative will to show mercy to some people and God’s determinative will to harden other people must be maintained.

In the case of Israel. God had sent many prophets to them, but yet they continually hardened their hearts and turned away from God. So God finally hardened their hearts so that they could not repent anymore<sup>197</sup>.

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<sup>186</sup> Exodus 32:32

<sup>187</sup> Exodus 33:13-16

<sup>188</sup> Exodus 33:19

<sup>189</sup> G: eleeó

<sup>190</sup> G: oiktiró

<sup>191</sup> Mark 10:45; John 10:11; 1 Peter 3:18a; Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9

<sup>192</sup> James 2:13

<sup>193</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24,26; Galatians 2:2; 5:7; Hebrews 12:1

<sup>194</sup> Exodus 7:13; 8:32; 9:34

<sup>195</sup> Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8

<sup>196</sup> G: sklérunó

<sup>197</sup> Isaiah 6:9-10; cf. Proverbs 27:1; Matthew 21:33-46

In the case of the Pharisees. They continually criticised Jesus and his disciples and even plotted to kill Jesus<sup>198</sup>. So Jesus finally hardened their hearts so that they could not repent anymore<sup>199</sup>.

In the case of Gentiles. They had deliberately suppressed and twisted the truth that God had revealed in creation and in their hearts (1:18,25; cf. 1:19-20; 2:14). So God gave them over to a life of sexual immorality, a depraved mind, and every kind of wickedness (1:24,26,28). They had *continually* hardened their hearts against God, so that finally God with a determinative action gave them over to a hardened heart. They *finally* reaped what they had sown throughout their lives<sup>200</sup>.

In the case of all people who live on earth. Their sins deserves condemnation, punishment and eternal doom (3:23; 5:16,18). No one is worthy of God's mercy and forgiveness! No one has a legitimate right or can make any legitimate claim on God's forgiveness (righteousness, salvation)!

**Divine will and hardening.** God has mercy on the elect. They certainly do not deserve it! By showing mercy to them God nevertheless remains *perfectly just*, because he had already punished their sins in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross<sup>201</sup>. In showing mercy God also remains *perfectly loving*, because he shows mercy and grace to an uncountable great number of unworthy people<sup>202</sup>. From eternity the sovereign God loved them and chose to show them his grace (9:18a)<sup>203</sup>.

And God hardens those he did not elect. They certainly deserve it! By hardening them God nevertheless remains *perfectly just*, because all people have sinned and not a single person can claim that he has the right to be justified (saved) (3:10-12,23). *The sovereign God chose to withhold his grace from them* (9:18b).

*Because the sin and punishment deserved are equally presupposed in God's hardening of some people and in God's showing mercy to other people, the differentiation between these two groups of people is altogether one of God's sovereign will and determination! From a judicial point of view, all people deserve to be hardened irretrievably!*

Certain people do not become children of God for two reasons: On God's judicial level, they do not become God's children because they have sinned and deserve hardening. And on God's sovereign level, they do not become God's children because God withholds his grace from them.

The sovereignty of which Paul speaks is not an abstract, theoretical sovereignty, but a concrete sovereignty that was exemplified in the history of Moses and Pharaoh: in a sovereign way God had mercy on Moses and in an equal sovereign way he hardened Pharaoh. Thus, God's sovereignty in the hardening of certain people is just as inviolate as his sovereignty in showing mercy to other people. *The opposite of God's sovereign election is God's sovereign rejection. In a complete sovereign way God has mercy on the elect and hardens the reprobate!*

Moreover, the words 'whom he wants'<sup>204</sup> emphasises Gods continuous sovereign and determinative will towards every individual in history. God always and continually exercises his sovereign and determinative will in two directions: in showing mercy and grace to the elect or in hardening those from who he withholds his mercy and grace. Thus, whoever is the recipient of God's mercy (and salvation) owes this favour exclusively to God's sovereign will! And whoever is the recipient of God's condemnation (and judgement) is fully responsible for his rejection<sup>205</sup>.

Conclusion 3. *People do not become the children of God by their human will (own free will, desire, decision, wish). They become the children of God only through God's sovereign love (grace, mercy, compassion)*<sup>206</sup>!

### **(III) 9:19-29. God chooses a remnant out of every nation to whom he grants salvation: the elect from every nation.**

a. God's sovereign will deals with showing mercy to his elect and not showing mercy to the rest (9:19-24)

**9:19. You will say<sup>207</sup> (vifa) to me then: "Why<sup>208</sup> does he (God) still *continue to find fault*<sup>209</sup> (vipn), for in this (matter) who is resisting<sup>210</sup> (vira) his will<sup>211</sup>?"**

<sup>198</sup> Matthew 12:2,7,10,14,24

<sup>199</sup> Matthew 13:11-15; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

<sup>200</sup> Galatians 6:7-8

<sup>201</sup> 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18

<sup>202</sup> Revelation 7:9

<sup>203</sup> cf. Ephesians 1:4-5

<sup>204</sup> G: theló) (present tense

<sup>205</sup> Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12; 21:8

<sup>206</sup> Ephesians 2:4-8

<sup>207</sup> 'eró' is future tense of 'eipon'

<sup>208</sup> G: ti

<sup>209</sup> G: memphomai

<sup>210</sup> G: anthhistémi

<sup>211</sup> G: bouléma



**9:20.** O man, on the contrary<sup>212</sup>, who are (vipa) you to *again and again* talk back<sup>213</sup> (vppn) to God? Will not<sup>214</sup> what is formed (moulded) say (vifa) to him who *once for all* formed (vpaa) it, ‘Why did you *once for all* make (viaa) me like this?’

**9:21.** Does not the potter<sup>215</sup> *always* have (vipa) the right (authority and power)<sup>216</sup> to make (vnaa) out of the same lump<sup>217</sup> of clay<sup>218</sup> one vessel for honour (by people by the use it is put to) and another for dishonour?

**9:22.** [The unexpressed but assumed subject in verse 22-24 is: Who would dare to find fault with God] if<sup>219</sup> he, decides purposes, resolves<sup>220</sup> (vppa) to show (vnam) his wrath and make known<sup>221</sup> (vnaa) his power, bore<sup>222</sup> (viaa)(the main verb) with great patience vessels (objects) of his wrath, prepared (ready, ripe)<sup>223</sup> (vprp)(note: passive voice) for destruction.

**9:23.** in order to make known (vsaa) the riches of his glory (i.e. his righteousness, love, abundant new life)(lavished) upon vessels of mercy, which he *once for all* prepared beforehand<sup>224</sup> (viaa)(note: active voice) for glory.

**9:24.** even us, whom he *once for all* called<sup>225</sup> (viaa), not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

### **The ultimate things are unchangeable things upon which man can have no influence at all.**

*They are God’s sovereign and all-determining will for everything and all. They have limits far beyond man. Man must submit himself to these ultimate things.*

- God’s work in creation is an ultimate thing. God’s sovereign work in creation determines who we are, when we live in history and where we live on this earth<sup>226</sup>. Only God’s sovereign will determines what every creature and every created thing becomes.
- God’s work in history is an ultimate thing. God’s sovereign reign over heaven and earth works out every event in history in conformity with the purpose of his will<sup>227</sup>. Only God’s sovereign will determines every historical event.
- God’s work in judgement is an ultimate thing. God’s sovereign present judgements like earthquakes, floods, famines, epidemics, wars, crashing of the economy and financial world, etc. have the purpose to discipline Christians so that Christians will not be permanently condemned together with the evil world<sup>228</sup>. God’s sovereign final judgement of the world will justly judge people’s unrighteousness (3:6).
- God’s work in salvation is an ultimate thing. God’s sovereign will (or God’s sovereign purpose according to election) determines to whom he shows mercy and from whom he withholds his mercy (8:28-30; 9:6-26).

In the New Testament there is no longer any difference between the two Greek words for ‘will’<sup>229</sup>. The implication of the words, “Who is resisting his will?” is that not a single person has placed himself in the position of withstanding God’s will. Deep in his heart everyone knows that he has no just claim with God. Who is he to dispute God’s government? Who is he to question God’s resolutions or attack his decisions?

**God’s sovereign will is an ultimate thing (9:19-21).** This paragraph deals with the objection that some people feel that they are *victims* of God’s irresistible will and determination. Paul shows that *God’s sovereign will and determination does not relieve people of their personal responsibility and blame.*

The Bible speaks about God’s sovereign rule not over *perfect* people, but over sinners (people far below the neutral line between salvation and condemnation)! Man is not ‘divine’ as some religions claim. Man is not ‘born in complete innocence’, as other religions claim. Man is not by nature ‘good’, as humanism claims. Man is ‘clay’. The clay has already fallen, is cracked and depraved. The contrast between man as creature and God as Creator shows the arrogant attitude of man when he questions God!

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<sup>212</sup> G: menoun ge

<sup>213</sup> G: antapokrinó

<sup>214</sup> G: ‘mé’, the implied answer is a strong negative)

<sup>215</sup> G: kerameus

<sup>216</sup> G: exousia

<sup>217</sup> G: phuramos

<sup>218</sup> G: pélos

<sup>219</sup> G: ei. Conditional particle “if”

<sup>220</sup> G: theló

<sup>221</sup> G: gnórizó

<sup>222</sup> G: pheró, oisó, énegka

<sup>223</sup> G: katartizó

<sup>224</sup> G: prohetoimazó

<sup>225</sup> G: kaleó

<sup>226</sup> Acts 17:24-27

<sup>227</sup> Ephesians 1:7-12

<sup>228</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:32

<sup>229</sup> G: boulomai and theló

Every time a person is confronted with an ultimate thing he should not arrogantly question God, but submit himself to the ultimate thing. He should submit himself to God<sup>230</sup> and to God's sovereign will: "Not my will, but yours (i.e. your perfect will) be done"<sup>231</sup>. He should be content with how he is created (his physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional features, his personality), with his social status and with his circumstances in life. He should agree with God. He should not question God's ways. He should not speak against God's decisions. He should have a deep respect for God's sovereignty and majesty. He should show reverential silence which God's majesty demands of him. The non-Christian does not believe in the God of the Bible and therefore also not in the ultimate things taught in the Bible. But the Christian believes in the God of the Bible and the ultimate things revealed in the Bible.

Because God's work in salvation is an ultimate thing, that is, his sovereign will (electing purpose) determines to whom he shows mercy and from whom he withholds his mercy (8:28-30; 9:6-26), therefore the Christian should be pleasantly surprised with joy and greatly amazed that God has shown his mercy and grace to him in Jesus Christ! He should speak with enthusiasm about God's plan (cf. 11:33-36)! No one should question the right of the Potter to make out of the same lump of clay some vessels for honourable (special) purposes and some for more dishonourable (common) purposes<sup>232</sup>. God does not merely have the power to do this, but also the right/authority to do this! The comparison between the Potter and the clay is often repeated in the Old Testament<sup>233</sup>. God has the sovereign right to dispose of his creatures as he wants, because all creatures belong to him as Creator<sup>234</sup>!

Both the Old Testament passages as this New Testament passage, do not deal with God's sovereign right over people 'as merely people', but over people 'as sinners'. The Bible is not simply dealing with a theoretical situation, but with the real situation of fallen humanity. Paul is dealing with God's actual government of the real fallen, broken and degenerate world!

All deserve to be eternally doomed! God did not simply create people in order to punish or destroy them.

**God's patience is subordinated to God's sovereign/determinative will.** The unexpressed but assumed subject in verse 22-24 is: "Who would dare to find fault with God" if he bore with much patience the objects of his wrath in order to make known his glory (righteousness, holiness and love) towards the objects of his mercy? Paul refers to God's sovereign and determinative will and not simply to his wishing!

There are two views about the words: "What if". The best is the second view.

- God's sovereign/determinative will is subordinated under God's patience. Here God's patience is emphasised. Although God is determined (wills) to execute his wrath, his patience nevertheless restrains and postpones the execution of the deserved punishment (cf. 2:4) and gives people a chance to repent<sup>235</sup>. However because the 'you' in 2 Peter 3:9 refers, not to unbelievers, but to believers<sup>236</sup>, the best view is the following:
- God's patience is subordinated under God's sovereign/determinative will. Here God's sovereign will is emphasised. Because God is determined (wills) to give more illustrious display of his wrath and power, he exercises patience. His patience serves the purpose of effectively displaying his wrath and power. This is better in this context.

"To show his wrath and make his power known" (9:22) is parallel to "displaying his power and proclaiming his name in all the earth" (9:17). What God did to Pharaoh is an example of what God does to the objects of his wrath. That is why God's patience must be subordinated under God's sovereign/determinative will to show his wrath and make his power known. Paul is thinking of the unbelief of Israel and the patience with which God endures their unbelief. He reminds his kinsmen (the Jews) that God's patience is not the certificate of God's alleged favour for Jews (and thus the assurance of his alleged forgiveness of Jews), but that, however awful it might be, God's patience serves to make clear that the objects of his wrath deserve his punishment!

**God's sovereign will deals with the damnation/destruction of many people – the objects of God's wrath (9:22).**

The objects of God's wrath are the cause of their own destruction. God chooses to withhold his mercy.

"The vessels (objects) of his wrath" are "prepared for destruction". This could mean two things:

- The passive voice: The objects of God's wrath "were created or fitted for destruction" by God.
- The middle voice: The objects of God's wrath "prepared themselves for destruction."

The question is whether God prepared them for destruction or whether they prepared themselves for destruction. On the one hand, although it is not expressly stated that God prepared them for destruction, the parallel with verse 18, where God hardens whom he wants to harden, makes it clear that there is nothing against the teaching of the context if we regard God as the agent that prepares people for destruction. On the other hand, we may not categorically state that Paul intended to convey this notion in this case. The main thought is that the destruction meted out to the vessels of wrath is

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<sup>230</sup> James 4:7

<sup>231</sup> Luke 22:42

<sup>232</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 2:19-20

<sup>233</sup> Isaiah 29:15-16; 45:9; 64:8-9; Jeremiah 18:1-6

<sup>234</sup> Psalm 24:1

<sup>235</sup> cf. 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>236</sup> cf. 2 Peter 1:1

something for which their former condition suits them. There is an exact correspondence between what they were in this life (their responsibility) and the perdition to which they are consigned (God's responsibility).

In the case of the objects of God's wrath there is continuity between their life in the present and their life to come. There is no release from their human responsibility or guilt. "The wages/compensation of sin is eternal death" (6:23). "A man reaps what he sows"<sup>237</sup>. The objects of God's wrath receive what they deserve; they are the cause of their own destruction.

God elected the objects of his wrath (9:22) to show his serious warning about his holy and righteous wrath against everything that causes sin and everyone who do evil<sup>238</sup>. As objects of his wrath God prepared them for destruction. Because they had continually hardened their hearts (with unbelief and disobedience)<sup>239</sup> against the God of the Bible in this life, the sovereign God determined that they become hardened forever (1:18-32; 11:7-10)<sup>240</sup>.

**God's sovereign will deals with the salvation of many people – the objects of God's mercy (9:23).**

In the case of the objects of God's mercy there is continuity between their life in the present and their life to come. However, they are not the cause of their own salvation. God chooses to show them mercy. God prepares them before for glory. Here it is clearly God (active voice) who had prepared them before for glory.

While we can say that 'the objects of God's wrath' are the cause of their own destruction (9:22), we cannot say that 'the objects of God's mercy' are the cause of their own salvation (9:23)! God only is the sovereign agent of their future glory! No one deserves God's mercy and no one can earn God's grace. But there is continuity between the process of grace that operates in this life (resulting in justification, sanctification and fruitfulness) and the glory that is ultimately achieved in the life to come (8:29-30)! Even *before the creation* the sovereign God had planned the future of his people<sup>241</sup>. And *in the course of history* he has revealed that sovereign plan to them (8:30)<sup>242</sup>. Jesus already said, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared<sup>243</sup> for you since the creation of the world"<sup>244</sup>.

God elected the objects of his mercy to show the riches of his glory to everyone sovereignly elected in the world. 'God's glory' is the sum of all God's perfections and the 'riches' refer to the splendour and fullness characterising these perfections. His perfect divine characteristics are magnified in his work of mercy.

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<sup>237</sup> Galatians 6:7

<sup>238</sup> Matthew 13:41

<sup>239</sup> Isaiah 6:9-10; cf. Hebrews 4:1-2,6

<sup>240</sup> Matthew 13:11-15; Galatians 6:8a; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31; Revelation 21:8

<sup>241</sup> Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9b

<sup>242</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 1:9a,10

<sup>243</sup> G: hetoimazó, perfect tense, passive voice

<sup>244</sup> Matthew 25:34

His people experience spiritual blessings; they are adopted as mature sons into God's family; they live a holy life; they experience glorious grace upon grace, redemption and forgiveness of sins; they know God's will; they are included in Christ and his Body; they are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit and they have a genuine expectation of inheriting the new earth. They are chosen as his people and predestined to be for the praise of God's glory<sup>245</sup>!

**Conclusion 4.** *People do not become the children of God because they deserve it.* They become the children of God only through God's sovereign and all-determining will to show mercy and grace to completely unworthy people!

Thus, all people on earth are instruments for the display of God's justice in judgement (9:17,22) or for the exhibition of God's mercy unto salvation (9:23)!

**Nevertheless, God uses unbelievers and wicked people in a sovereign way to accomplish his purpose in the world.**

The Lord says, "I bring prosperity and create disaster"<sup>246</sup>. God uses the kings in the world to accomplish his purpose!<sup>247</sup>

- **Pharaoh (about 1447 B.C.).** Although the sovereign God hardened the Egyptian king Pharaoh's heart, he can still use him for his purpose. God raised up Pharaoh on the scene of history for the very purpose to show God's power at work in his own people and to proclaim the name of the God of the Bible in all the earth<sup>248</sup>.
- **Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.).** Likewise, the God of the Bible raised up the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser to punish the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) in 734 B.C.<sup>249</sup> and the kingdom of Aram (Damascus) in 732 B.C.<sup>250</sup>. "In that day the LORD will use a razor hired from beyond the River (Euphrates) – the king of Assyria – to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take of your beards also"<sup>251</sup>.
- **Shalmaneser V (726-722 B.C.).** God used the Assyrian king Shalmaneser to finally punish the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel had sinned against the LORD, had rejected the covenant, had imitated the nations around them, had made and worshipped idols and had refused to listen to the prophets through whom the LORD had warned them. Therefore the LORD rejected Israel, tore them away from the house of David and removed them from his presence. He carried the northern kingdom of Israel into exile to Assyria in 722 B.C. and resettled its territory with foreigners from the area of Babylon<sup>252</sup>.
- **Sargon (721-705 B.C.).** Besides punishing Samaria and Damascus, God would send another Assyrian king, Sargon, to punish the great countries like the mighty Hittites on the West side of the Euphrates in the battle at Carchemish (717 B.C.).
- **Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.).** And God would send yet another Assyrian king, Sennacherib, to punish the southern kingdom of Judah. But instead of only punishing Judah, he besieged Jerusalem and intended to destroy Judah. Because he failed to execute God's plan, God prophesied that he would also punish and destroy the Assyrian Empire. "Woe to the Assyrian, *the rod of my anger*, in whose hand is *the club of my wrath* (the Assyrian king is the instrument of God's present judgement)! I send him against a godless nation; I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." But this is not what he (the Assyrian) intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations"<sup>253</sup>. Therefore, when the LORD has finished all his work against Judah he would also punish the king of Assyria for his wilful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes. It was the LORD who had punished all the above nations, but the instrument of his punishment claimed the honour for himself<sup>254</sup>. "Does the axe (the Assyrian king) raise itself above him who swings it (the LORD), or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood! Therefore the LORD Almighty will send a wasting disease" and a blazing fire upon them that would consume and completely destroy them"<sup>255</sup>. "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders. This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back"<sup>256</sup>?" "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In the days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass"<sup>257</sup>. So, in 701 B.C. the angel of the LORD went out and put to death 185000 men in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib broke camp and withdrew from Jerusalem back to Nineveh where his sons murdered him<sup>258</sup>.

<sup>245</sup> Ephesians 1:3-14; 4:1,17; 5:28,15

<sup>246</sup> Isaiah 45:7

<sup>247</sup> Think of the Napoleonic wars, the first and second world war and the recent war between Russia and Ukraine.

<sup>248</sup> Exodus 15:11-15; Joshua 2:9-10; 9:9; Psalm 78:12-13; 105:26-38; 106:9-11; 136:10-15

<sup>249</sup> 2 Kings 15:29

<sup>250</sup> 2 Kings 16:9) (2 Kings 15:19; 16:1-20; Isaiah 7:17-20; 8:4-8; 10:5-6

<sup>251</sup> Isaiah 7:20

<sup>252</sup> 2 Kings 17:1-41

<sup>253</sup> Isaiah 10:5-11

<sup>254</sup> Isaiah 10:12-15) cf. 36:1-22; 37:1-35

<sup>255</sup> Isaiah 10:15-19,33-34

<sup>256</sup> Isaiah 14:24-27

<sup>257</sup> Isaiah 37:26

<sup>258</sup> Isaiah 37:36-38

- Nebuchadnezzar (605-563 B.C.). Likewise God used the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, *the LORD's servant*<sup>259</sup>, to punish the southern kingdom of Judah in 605, 597 and 587 B.C.<sup>260</sup>.
- Cyrus (559-530 B.C.). The LORD stirred up one from the east (Persia) and the north (Media), the Medo-Persian king Cyrus to punish the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C.<sup>261</sup>. Cyrus is '*the LORD's shepherd*' and will accomplish all that the LORD pleases<sup>262</sup>. He is '*the LORD's anointed*' to subdue nations before him<sup>263</sup>. "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfil my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do'"<sup>264</sup>.
- Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). And God raised up the Greek king Alexander to punish the Medo-Persian Empire (the ram with two horns)<sup>265</sup>. The shaggy goat is the kingdom of Greece and the large horn between his eyes is the first king, Alexander the Great<sup>266</sup>.

Conclusion 5. "God works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster"<sup>267</sup>. "God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will"<sup>268</sup>. God reveals his patience and power in the objects of his wrath and glory in the objects of his mercy (9:22-23)<sup>269</sup>.

b. God's sovereign will deals with the call of Gentile believers (9:25-26).

**9:25**. As he also says (vifa) in Hosea: "I will certainly call (vifa) 'Not my people' 'my people'; and 'Not my loved one' (vprp) 'my loved one' (vprp);

**9:26**. and it will *certainly* happen (vifd) that in the very place where it was *once for all* said<sup>270</sup> (viap) to them, 'You (are) not my people', there they will *certainly* be called (vifp) 'sons of the living God'."

**Two contrasts in Romans 9.**

- *The elect (believing) Jews (the true Israel)* are contrasted to the natural nation of Israel (9:6-24a).
- *The elect (believing) Gentiles* are contrasted to the unbelieving Jews (9:24b-33).

Both prove that God's covenant made in the Old Testament with the patriarchs<sup>271</sup> had not failed: the elect remnant of Israel is being saved and the elect people from all the Gentile nations in the world are also being saved. Paul speaks about how God's sovereign/determinative will unto salvation is being realised in the present (New Testament) time.

God called people from the natural nation of Israel (9:11b,24a), but also from the Gentile nations (9:24b)! God's calling is based on God's sovereign eternal foreknowledge (God's sovereign eternal election) and God's predestination (God's sovereign eternal purpose). Therefore God's calling unto salvation is always effective (8:29-30; 11:29)<sup>272</sup>!

The reference to the Gentiles is very significant, because *it shows that God's sovereign promise, sovereign electing purpose and sovereign mercy have a much broader scope than the Jews expected!* In Romans 9 Paul proves that the covenant promise was fulfilled exactly as God had promised to Abraham: "All the families of the earth would be blessed in his Seed"<sup>273</sup>! God's covenant promise did not fail (9:6)! It came into effect in the 'true Israel' (9:6b), which in context refers to believers among the Jews, but ultimately includes all believers among the Gentiles. God's covenant was first manifested in the objects of his mercy among the Jews (1:16a; 9:24a; cf. 9:6)<sup>274</sup> and secondly in the objects of his mercy among the Gentiles(1:16b; 9:24b; cf. 8:33)<sup>275</sup>. In this way God's covenant promise and electing grace reaches every tribe and language and people and nation on earth<sup>276</sup>!

**Two prophecies in Hosea have been fulfilled in the Old Testament and in the New Testament context.** The two quotations from the Old Testament are God's confirmation of the call of the Gentiles.

<sup>259</sup> Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6

<sup>260</sup> Habakkuk 1:2-12; 2 Kings 25:1-30; Jeremiah 25:8-11; 27:1-11; 29:10,15-19

<sup>261</sup> Daniel 5:30-31; Isaiah 13:1-3,17-22; 41:2-4,25; 43:14

<sup>262</sup> Isaiah 44:28

<sup>263</sup> Isaiah 45:1

<sup>264</sup> Isaiah 46:10-11

<sup>265</sup> Daniel 8:1-8,19-22; cf. 10:20; Zechariah 11:16

<sup>266</sup> Daniel 8:21

<sup>267</sup> Proverbs 16:4

<sup>268</sup> Ephesians 1:11b

<sup>269</sup> Ephesians 1:11a,12

<sup>270</sup> G: eipon, eró, errethé

<sup>271</sup> Genesis 22:17-18; cf. Isaiah 49:6

<sup>272</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 1:15; 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>273</sup> Genesis 12:3

<sup>274</sup> Matthew 10:5-6

<sup>275</sup> Matthew 28:19; Acts 13:46; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>276</sup> Matthew 28:19; Revelation 5:9; 1 Peter 2:9-10

- In the Old Testament context<sup>277</sup> these two verses *refer to the nation of Israel* and not to the Gentile nations! The natural nation of Israel was *no longer* the people of God during the period of the godless and wicked kings of Israel (1032-587B.C., 445 years)<sup>278</sup>. Nevertheless, God promised in Hosea (754-714 B.C.) that Jews out of the natural nation of Israel would in the future again be the people of God<sup>279</sup>. This prophecy was in the first place fulfilled for Israel (the Jews) at the return of the Jews from exile from Babylon and later fulfilled at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jews from many nations in Jerusalem during Pentecost<sup>280</sup>.
- In the New Testament context (9:25-26) these two verses *refer to the Gentile nations* and not to the nation of Israel. The Old Testament prophecies were a type of the New Testament fulfilment in a much higher sense than the reader of the Old Testament could expect<sup>281</sup>! The apostle Paul *applies the principle of the initial rejection and the later restoration* of Israel in Hosea 2:23 and 1:9-10 to the Gentiles! The initial rejection of the nation of Israel and the later restoration of the believing remnant of Israel has its parallel in *the initial exclusion* of the Gentile nations from the privileges of Israel<sup>282</sup> and the *later inclusion* of the believers among the Gentile nations into God's covenant favour<sup>283</sup>!

*The believers in Jesus Christ from the Gentile nations are God's people on equal terms with the believers in Jesus Christ from the Jewish nation*<sup>284</sup>! The designations 'God's people', 'God's loved one' and 'sons of the living God' express the differing aspects of the new relationship, which are the result of God's effectual call unto salvation. The emphasis falls on "those who were *once* not my people" are *now* called "my people"<sup>285</sup>! The words: "In the place where" in Hosea means in Paul's application "in every place where people had been regarded as aliens they will be called the children of God". In all the Gentile countries there eventually will be people named true children of God<sup>286</sup>!

c. God's sovereign will deals with the salvation of the remnant of Jewish believers (9:27-29).

**9:27.** But Isaiah cries out (vipa) concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be (vspa) as the sand of the sea, (only) the remnant (rest)<sup>287</sup> will certainly be saved (vifp).

**9:28.** For the Lord will certainly carry out (do)(vifa) his sentence (word) on earth completely (to bring to an end, to complete, to carry out, to fulfil, to accomplish)<sup>288</sup> (vppa) and quickly (to cut short, to limit)<sup>289</sup> (vppa)."

**9:29.** It is just as Isaiah said previously<sup>290</sup> (vira): "If the Lord of hosts had not once for all left<sup>291</sup> (viaa) us a seed, we would have become<sup>292</sup> (viao) like Sodom, we would have been made<sup>293</sup> (viap) like Gomorra."

**The severity and extent of God's judgement on Israel.** Isaiah quotes Isaiah 10:22b-23 from the Greek Old Testament. In that passage Isaiah speaks about God's indignation executed against Israel through the instrumentality of Assyria as 'the rod of his anger and the club of his wrath'<sup>294</sup>. So widespread will be the destruction of Israel that only a remnant of Israel would escape. *The Old Testament thus demonstrates that God's promises did not pertain to the whole natural nation of Israel, but only to the remnant of the nation of Israel.*

The prophecies of the Old Testament clearly speak of a remnant of Israel. Already during the Old Testament period, the number of Israelites was uncountable<sup>295</sup>, as the dust of the earth<sup>296</sup>, as the stars in the sky<sup>297</sup> and as the sand on the seashore<sup>298</sup>.

<sup>277</sup> Hosea 2:23; 1:10

<sup>278</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>279</sup> Hosea 1:10

<sup>280</sup> Acts 2:5-12,36-41

<sup>281</sup> cf. Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44; Ephesians 3:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>282</sup> Ephesians 2:1-3,11-12

<sup>283</sup> Ephesians 2:4-10,13-22

<sup>284</sup> Ephesians 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>285</sup> cf. Ephesians 2:11,13

<sup>286</sup> Revelation 5:9-10

<sup>287</sup> G: hupoleimma

<sup>288</sup> G: sunteleó

<sup>289</sup> G: suntemnó

<sup>290</sup> G: prolegó

<sup>291</sup> G: egkataleipó

<sup>292</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>293</sup> G: homoioó

<sup>294</sup> Isaiah 10:5

<sup>295</sup> 1 Kings 3:8

<sup>296</sup> Genesis 13:16; 2 Chronicles 1:9

<sup>297</sup> Genesis 15:5; Deuteronomy 10:22

<sup>298</sup> Genesis 22:17; 1 Kings 4:20

Nevertheless, though Israel was that numerous, only the remnant of Israel would return to ‘the Mighty God’, who in the context of the book Isaiah is Jesus Christ<sup>299</sup>, that is, only a remnant of the natural nation of Israel would be saved<sup>300</sup>.

God would carry out this sentence, this destruction of the natural nation of Israel on earth, with the same sovereign/determinative purpose as his destruction of Assyria in Isaiah 14:24-27, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.” “For the Lord Almighty has purposed and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?”

Whatever God has purposed will definitely come to pass. The emphasis is on the finality with which God will complete and finish his plan with Israel! Although many Jews rejected the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and thereby fell away from God’s covenant promise, there are still Jews who believe in Jesus Christ and are saved (11:2-4).

The remnant of Israel consists of the believing Jews<sup>301</sup>. *Isaiah is not simply speaking about the remnant returning from exile, but about the remnant returning to ‘the Mighty God’<sup>302</sup>, which in the context refers to Jesus Christ!*

The words “to carry out his sentence completely and quickly” are not easy to interpret and have been interpreted in different ways:

- God would act by accomplishing and shortening his promise, that is, he would fulfil his promise to Israel only in a limited degree. This is not likely, because God is Almighty and will fulfil 100% of his promise!
- God would act by accomplishing his promise to Israel, but Israel would enter salvation in a cut down or trimmed number, that is, as a remnant (verse 27).
- God would act by closing the account and shortening (the time), that is, he would not prolong indefinitely the period of his patience.
- The context explains the general idea: God would take definite and vigorous action. He would carry out his sentence completely and quickly. Punishment would not be postponed and would be severe. In the present context is also implies that *Israel would be cut down to size, that is, only a remnant would be saved*. The New Testament teaching and history prove that this is exactly what happened!

Paul quotes Isaiah 1:9. The Hebrew text literally says, ‘a very small remnant’<sup>303</sup>, while the Greek Old Testament text says ‘seed’<sup>304</sup>. They have the same meaning and refer to the partakers of God’s covenant promise. While the emphasis of verse 27 is that only a remnant would be saved, the emphasis of verse 29 is that this remnant is the preserved rest apart from which the natural nation of Israel would have been given up to utter destruction! Amos 3:12 says, “As a shepherd saves from the lion’s mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved.” This shows the severity and extent of God’s judgement executed.

That a remnant is saved is the evidence of the Lord’s favour and the guarantee that his covenant promise has not failed. The emphasis in this context is nevertheless not on judgement, but on salvation: on the sovereign will and determinate purpose of God applied to the preservation (salvation) of a remnant.

#### **(IV) 9:30-33. God chose a Rock (Jesus Christ).**

**9:30.** What then shall (vifa) we say? That the Gentiles, who were not pursuing (vppa) righteousness, have *once for all* obtained (viaa) righteousness, a righteousness that is by faith.

**9:31.** But Israel, though she *continually* pursued (vppa) a law (principle) of righteousness<sup>305</sup>, she *once for all* did not attain (arrive at)<sup>306</sup> (viaa) to (that) law.

**9:32a.** Why (not)? Because (they pursued the law of righteousness) not by faith but as if it were by works.

**9:32b.** They *once for all* stumbled<sup>307</sup> (viaa) over the Stumbling Stone<sup>308</sup>.

**9:33.** As it is written (virp), “See, I lay (vifa) in Zion a Stone of Stumbling<sup>309</sup> and a Rock of Offence<sup>310</sup>. But he who puts his trust (vppa) in him will *certainly* not be put to shame (vifp).”

The unexpected, namely that the Gentiles would obtain righteousness, happened! This emphasises the sovereign and determinative will of God.

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<sup>299</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>300</sup> Isaiah 10:22a; cf. 1 Kings 19:18; Jeremiah 50:20; Joel 2:32; Amos 3:12; Micah 2:12; cf. Daniel 5:26-28

<sup>301</sup> John 1:11-13

<sup>302</sup> Isaiah 10:21

<sup>303</sup> H: sarid kim’at, some survivors

<sup>304</sup> G: sperma (descendants)

<sup>305</sup> G: nomos dikaiosuné

<sup>306</sup> G: phthanó

<sup>307</sup> G: proskoptó

<sup>308</sup> G: proskomma

<sup>309</sup> G: lithon proskommatos

<sup>310</sup> G: petra skandalou



“What are we to make of it?” The outcome is so different from what God’s dealings in the past with the Israelites and the Gentile nations would lead us to expect! The strange outcome is that the Gentiles, who did not follow after righteousness, gained it, while the Jews, who followed after righteousness, failed to gain it!

There is an allusion to the fact that the Gentile nations during the Old Testament period were outside the pale of God’s special revelation and had been abandoned to their own ways<sup>311</sup>. The Gentiles generally lived in moral and spiritual darkness (1:18-32)<sup>312</sup>. Nevertheless, the focus in this passage is especially on *the righteousness which leads to justification by God!* The Gentiles were not destitute of moral interest (2:12-15), but they did not pursue the righteousness of God that secures justification with God.

In contrast to the Gentiles, the Jews pursued righteousness, but their kind of righteousness was a human righteousness and their way of gaining righteousness was by human effort.

There is nothing wrong with seeking to attain to a state of righteousness in God’s eyes. The problem was that the Jews proceeded from a false presupposition (law, principle), namely, that by trying very hard to keep the law (in the sense of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws, as interpreted by the Jewish teachers) they would someday be able to observe God’s entire law, so that they would be able to boast: “We have made it! We are keeping God’s entire law! We have attained righteousness by our own effort and power and on the basis of our own resources.”

The law or principle which the Jews were following was entirely wrong with respect to the kind of righteousness they were seeking and with respect to the way of attaining that righteousness. The kind of righteousness the Jews were seeking was not the righteousness which God attained (through Jesus Christ), but the righteousness which the Jews themselves attained (through keeping the law). It was not the absolute (100%) perfect holiness and righteousness which God required, but ‘the as good as possible’ and ‘nevertheless far from perfect’ righteousness which Jews could attain. The way of attaining righteousness was not by receiving God’s perfect righteousness by faith, but by gaining imperfect human righteousness by their works of the law.

The Jewish religious leaders and teachers taught a law (a principle, a teaching) of righteousness in which it was possible for man to gain righteousness with God through his own efforts. The Jews took for granted that they would be able to fulfil the demands of God’s law by their own efforts and resources. But that law forever remained far ahead of them. That law could never be reached!

*Jesus and the apostles taught another kind of righteousness and another way of attaining to true righteousness.* Jesus told a parable about the tax-collector who prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” And God justified him<sup>313</sup>! Paul proclaimed, “God made him (Jesus Christ) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him (Jesus Christ) we might become the righteousness of God”<sup>314</sup>. Those who believe this are justified (3:24-25). Peter proclaimed, “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous (Jesus Christ) for the unrighteous (people), to bring you (who believe this truth) to God”<sup>315</sup>.

**People stumble, because they try to pursue their own righteousness.** Religious people, who *pursue* (their own) righteousness (the right standing with God) by the wrong means (the works of the law) stumble. They stumble because they try to be justified in God’s eyes by their own religious worship and works. The Jews (and other religions) tried to obtain their own righteousness by for example keeping the following five laws:

- They made a confession that they believed in only one God<sup>316</sup>.
- They prayed three times a day<sup>317</sup> facing the temple in Jerusalem<sup>318</sup>.
- They fasted two times every week<sup>319</sup>.
- They gave one tenth of their income<sup>320</sup>.
- And they made three pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year<sup>321</sup>!

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<sup>311</sup> Acts 14:16; 17:30

<sup>312</sup> Ephesians 2:11-12

<sup>313</sup> Luke 18:13-14

<sup>314</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>315</sup> 1 Peter 3:18a

<sup>316</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>317</sup> Daniel 6:10

<sup>318</sup> 1 Kings 8:30

<sup>319</sup> Luke 18:12

<sup>320</sup> Luke 18:12

<sup>321</sup> Deuteronomy 16:16

Of course, the Jews had many more laws: they wore the correct religious dress<sup>322</sup>, the men did not shave their heads or trim their beards<sup>323</sup>; they observed religious ablution ceremonies<sup>324</sup>, they ate only clean food<sup>325</sup> and they showed off their piety in public<sup>326</sup>. The Jews hoped that God would declare them righteous on the basis of their own religious merits and accomplishments. They were very mistaken, because true righteousness can never be obtained by keeping the law!

Christians, who *obtain* true righteousness by grace through faith, never stumble. They cannot stumble, because God reckons the perfect righteousness of Christ to them (4:3-8)! Thereby God declares the believer in Christ perfectly righteous in his eyes and from that time onwards regards and treats him as completely righteous. Thus, true righteousness can be obtained, but only by grace through faith!

**People stumble, because they reject Christ and his righteousness (9:32b-33).** The Old Testament revelation warned Israel about the stone of stumbling and falling<sup>327</sup>. A stone of stumbling is like stumbling over a hurdle in a race and therefore failing to gain the prize. In Isaiah 8:14 the LORD himself is said to be 'the Stone of Stumbling' and 'the Rock of Offence' to both the houses of Israel (the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel). 'The rock of offence' is that which gives offence, causes revulsion and opposition, and is the object of anger or disapproval. Both terms may not be watered down as if they only refer to irritation and annoyance.

They refer to nothing less than stumbling and falling<sup>328</sup>. The Old Testament also announced the laying of a Tested Stone in Zion, a Precious Cornerstone for a sure foundation. That stone would give the one who trusts stability and security<sup>329</sup>.

There can be no doubt that *Jesus Christ and the apostles applied both passages pertaining to the LORD of hosts (God) in the Old Testament revelation to Jesus Christ in the New Testament revelation*<sup>330</sup>! Jesus Christ is the Stone that is destined to cause the falling of many in Israel (and of many in the non-Christian religions) and the rising of many in Israel (and of many in the Gentile nations who turn to Jesus Christ)<sup>331</sup>.

The faith in the Stone (Jesus Christ) is the faith that justifies. The faith mentioned in verse 30 and 32 is the faith specified in verse 33 as believing in Jesus Christ. It is the faith directed to justification. The Hebrew text of Isaiah 28:16 says, "He who trusts or believes shall not be in haste" and emphasises that the believer will not flee in disappointment or dismay. The Greek text<sup>332</sup> says, "He who trusts or believes shall not be put to shame" and emphasises that the believer will not have occasion to be ashamed of his confidence.

Every religion that rejects Jesus Christ or rejects the righteousness in Jesus Christ, stumbles over Jesus Christ. They stumble because they reject the only One who could give them perfect righteousness<sup>333</sup>. However, everyone who puts his trust in Jesus Christ and accepts Christ's righteousness will never be put to shame!

**People stumble, because they exclude the responsibility of man.** What is the relationship between God's will and man's will?

On the one hand, the so-called *free will of man* does not determine the sovereign will of God (Arminianism)<sup>334</sup>. "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails"<sup>335</sup>. *God's sovereignty guarantees that God's*

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<sup>322</sup> Leviticus 21:10; Numbers 15:38-39

<sup>323</sup> Leviticus 21:5

<sup>324</sup> Leviticus 15:11; Mark 7:3-4

<sup>325</sup> Leviticus 11:1-8

<sup>326</sup> Matthew 6:5; 23:5-7

<sup>327</sup> Isaiah 8:14

<sup>328</sup> John 11:9-10; Romans 14:13,20-21; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Peter 2:8

<sup>329</sup> Isaiah 28:16

<sup>330</sup> cf. Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6-8

<sup>331</sup> Luke 2:34

<sup>332</sup> cf. 1 Peter 2:6

<sup>333</sup> cf. John 16:8-9; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>334</sup> **Arminianism** is a branch of Protestantism based on the theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and his

historic supporters known as Remonstrants. They attempted to moderate the doctrines of Calvinism related to its interpretation of predestination. Classical Arminianism, to which Arminius is the main contributor, and Wesleyan Arminianism, to which John Wesley is the main contributor, are the two main schools of thought. Central Arminian beliefs are that God's preparing grace to regeneration is *universal*, and that God's justifying grace bringing regeneration is resistible.

Many Christian denominations have been influenced by Arminian views, notably the Baptists in 17th century, the Methodists in the 18th century, and the Pentecostals in the 20th century. Wesley attacked the determinism that he claimed characterized Calvinistic doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation (cf. Romans 9) and maintained a belief in conditional election and the ability to lose salvation (cf. John 10:28; Romans 8:29-30; Philippians 1:6). Wesley also clarified the doctrine of prevenient grace (God's grace precedes man's repentance and predisposes his heart to seek God). Wesley also preached the ability of Christians to attain to perfection (which he defined as 'full maturity', but not 'sinlessness').

During the 20th century, as Pentecostal churches began to settle and incorporate more standard forms, they started to formulate theology that was fully Arminian. Currently, the two largest Pentecostal denominations in the world, the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal Church of God denominations, hold officially to Arminian views such as resistible grace, conditional election, or conditional security of the believer.

<sup>335</sup> Proverbs 19:21

*will on earth will certainly be done*<sup>336</sup>. God's sovereign plan will stand and cannot be thwarted by man<sup>337</sup>. "God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will"<sup>338</sup>! In contrast, the natural will of man does not submit to God and cannot submit to God (8:5-8).

On the other hand, *the sovereign and determined will of God does not exclude the responsibility of man* to believe, to obey and to live a holy life! It does not replace or override the will and actions of man. There is a correspondence between what God in his sovereignty wills and what man subjectively is. Although God is first in proclaiming the gospel, man is responsible to respond (10:14-18)<sup>339</sup>. And although God is first and works in the believer to will and to act according to his good purpose, the believer must continue to work out his salvation with fear and trembling<sup>340</sup>.

However, man is quick to blame God. "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord"<sup>341</sup>.

Conclusion 6. God's sovereign and determinate will does not eliminate human responsibility! It is not as if God's sovereign will simply overrides the human will and action. The case is rather that what occurs in the one realm is correlative with what occurs in the other. This is not in the sense that the human will governs and determines God's will (the teaching of Arminianism). It is also not in the sense that God's will governs the human will *without the responsibility of the human will*! It is in the sense that *there is a correspondence between what the sovereign God wills and what responsible men subjectively are*. Man has been made in the image of God<sup>342</sup>.

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<sup>336</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>337</sup> Isaiah 14:24-27

<sup>338</sup> Ephesians 1:11

<sup>339</sup> cf. Mark 1:14-15

<sup>340</sup> Philippians 2:12-13

<sup>341</sup> Proverbs 19:3

<sup>342</sup> Genesis 1:26-27