

## ROMANS CHAPTER 9

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### Romans Chapter 9--Introduction

Chapters 9-11 of Romans form a unit. The subject matter of these three chapters is the nation Israel (see 9:3-4; 10:1,21; 11:1-2,26,28). These chapters are also somewhat parenthetical. The flow of thought could have gone from chapter 8 right into chapter 12. In the first eight chapters Paul has set forth THE GOSPEL OF GOD, that is, the good news of **JUSTIFICATION** (Romans 1-5), **SANCTIFICATION** (Romans 6-8) and **GLORIFICATION** (Romans 8). In chapter 12 he deals with the practical implications of the gospel (how the truth of the gospel ought to affect our daily living toward God and toward our neighbor). Thus chapter eight would flow naturally into chapter 12, but instead of doing that Paul gives us a three-chapter parenthesis in which he helps us to understand where the nation Israel fits into the purpose and plan of God.

This section begins with **GREAT SORROW** (9:1-3) and it ends with a **GREAT DOXOLOGY** to God (11:33-36). One simple way to think of the three chapters is as follows:

**Chapter 9** deals primarily with Israel's **PAST** (as God's chosen and privileged people).

**Chapter 10** deals primarily with Israel's **PRESENT** (as a nation which has refused to submit to God's gospel).

**Chapter 11** deals primarily with Israel's **FUTURE** (a nation which someday will be saved and which will enjoy the fulfillment of the new covenant promises).

In order to understand this section we need to try to put ourselves in the shoes of those who lived in the first century and to try to understand the **JEWISH PROBLEM**.

**Fact #1**--The Israelites are God's chosen people (Deut. 7:6-9; Romans 11:28).

**Fact #2**--God promised His chosen people that they would enjoy a glorious kingdom under their Messiah (Dan. 7:13-14; Isaiah 2:1-5; 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5-8; 31:31-37; 33:14-16; Luke 1:32-33).

**Fact #3**--The nation Israel (at least the great majority in the nation) rejected their Messiah when He came to earth (John 1:11; Matthew 12:22-24; Matthew 21:33-46; 27:22, 23, 25; John 19:15; Acts 22:22; 1 Th.2:14-15).

**Fact #4**--When the church first began it was made up entirely of Jewish believers (Acts chapter 2, the Day of Pentecost). But gradually this changed. As the years went by more and more Gentiles entered the church and less and less Jews (we see this as we travel through the book of Acts and also as we span the years of church history). Today (and this has been true for most of church history) the church is made up almost entirely of Gentile believers. We thank God for Jews who have believed on Christ as Messiah and as Saviour, but their numbers are few. The nation as a whole is blind though, thankfully, there are a few exceptions (see Romans 11:25).

Are you beginning to see the problem? Facts #1 and #2 seem to be contradicted by Facts #3 and #4. What has happened to Israel's glorious kingdom? What has happened to all of the promises which God has given to the Jews? God's program for the present (the church) involves primarily the Gentiles and not the Jews. Why is this so? Has God cast away His people (Compare Rom. 11:1)? Is God all through with the nation Israel? Does the nation have any future in God's program at all?

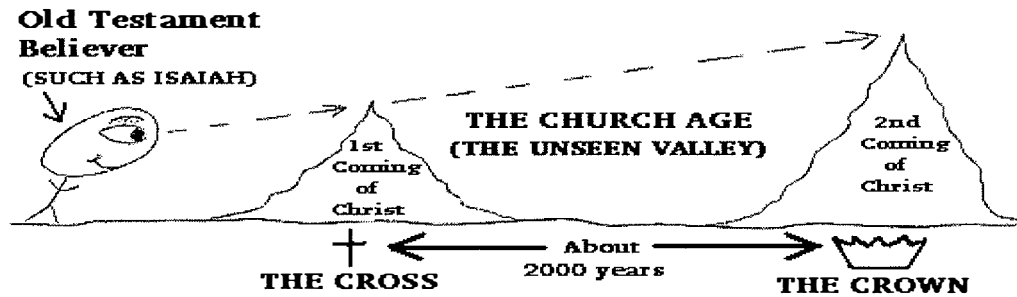
Put yourself in the shoes of a first century Jew. The gospel that Paul preached was either true or false. Jesus Christ, whom Paul preached, was either the true Messiah or He was not. Thus we have two alternatives: 1) The gospel that Paul preached is not true, and hence Jesus Christ is not the true Messiah and we must still await the coming of the true Messiah. If this is so, then the reason the Kingdom has not yet come is because the true Messiah has not yet come. 2) The gospel Paul preached is true and hence Jesus Christ is indeed the true Messiah. If this is so, then why is there no kingdom? Why do the Jewish people continue to suffer in this world? Why aren't the Old Testament kingdom promises being fulfilled? Has God cast away His people? **GOD HAS GIVEN TO US ROMANS CHAPTERS 9-11 TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.**

These issues are very relevant to our day as well. There are numerous professing Christians today, especially those under the influence of Reformed/Covenant Theology, who deny that the nation Israel has any hope of a future kingdom on earth under their Messiah as predicted in hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. Some teach that the CHURCH has inherited the promises that were made to ISRAEL. Others teach that the kingdom is here and now and that Christ is spiritually reigning in the hearts of His believers. Even though there is a sense in which this is true, it still does not solve the problem of hundreds of specific kingdom promises and predictions which have not yet been fulfilled. Did God really mean what He said about the kingdom and the coming Messiah or not? Romans chapters 9-11 are thus vitally important chapters in rightly understanding the place of Israel in God's program.

What is God doing with the nation Israel? The answer is basically twofold:

1. God has a wonderful plan and purpose for the Jew **TODAY**, but this plan and purpose cannot be realized until the Jewish person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. See Romans 10:9-13; 11:1-5.
2. God has a wonderful plan and purpose for the Jew **TOMORROW**, but this plan and purpose cannot be realized until the true Messiah of the Jews comes to this earth a second time. See Romans 11:25-28. Israel's present unbelief and rejection of the gospel will not keep God from fulfilling any of His kingdom promises to this nation (Rom. 11:28).

It should be noted that this present church age (which has lasted about 2000 years) was not revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Jew looked ahead into the distant future and saw a mountain peak which was the coming of the Messiah and the great kingdom age. He did not realize that what he was seeing was actually two mountain peaks with a valley in between:



Let's consider some Old Testament passages which illustrate this:

1) ISAIAH 9:6-7

Verse 6 speaks of Messiah's birth and verse 7 speaks of His kingdom but no hint is given that these two events are separated by hundreds of years.

2) MICAH 5:2

Messiah must be born in Bethlehem and He must be ruler in Israel. Only the first of these was fulfilled at His first coming.

3) ISAIAH 61:1-2 (compare Luke 4:18-19)

The Lord Jesus knew where to stop reading because He knew what part of this passage was fulfilled at His first coming. The day of judgment awaits His second coming.

4) ZECHARIAH 9:9-10

Which part of this prophecy was fulfilled at the Lord's first coming? (Compare Matthew 21:4-5.) Which part of this prophecy must await future fulfillment?

5) LUKE 1:31-33

This New Testament prophecy is similar to the Old Testament prophecies given above in that part pertains to His first coming and part must await future fulfillment at His second coming.

When the Old Testament Jew read His Bible he could only see **one coming**. Today we are living in the period between the two comings of Christ during which time He is building HIS CHURCH (Matt. 16:18) and taking out of the nations a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). As we read our Bible today we have the advantage of being better able to see two distinct comings of Christ--one is now history and one is still prophecy (**He has come and He will come again!**)

## Romans 9:1

In Chapter 8 Paul wrote of the glorious safety and security of those who are IN CHRIST. Now in chapter 9 we find him greatly concerned about the majority of Israelites who were not in Christ. "I say the truth" "I lie not"-- Paul is preparing us for what he is about to say. What he is about to say is so unbelievable that he must assure his readers that he is really speaking the truth. Paul made it very clear that he was telling the truth by saying it in three different ways: 1) "**I say the truth in Christ**" (apart from Christ he could not have said this because apart from Christ it would not have been true); 2) "**I lie not**" (though unbelievable, what I am about to say is true) 3) "**my**

**conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit."** If Paul were lying the Holy Spirit would have prodded and convicted his conscience and his conscience would have given him no peace but would have said, "Paul, you are lying." Paul knew that he did not have a guilty conscience. He knew he was telling the truth.

### Romans 9:2

"**Heaviness**" = grief, sorrow, pain. Paul was greatly grieved and in deep sorrow. "**Continual**" = without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), constant, unceasing. "**Sorrow**" = pain, woe (1 Tim. 6:10). If we only see Paul's grief here we are missing the full picture. We need to look beyond Paul's grief and see the Lord Himself weeping and grieving and sorrowing over His chosen people Israel (just as Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, is a picture to us of the grieved heart of Jehovah Himself). This verse might seem surprising to some in light of Paul's very harsh statements concerning the Jews in Romans 11:28 ("enemies") and especially 1 Thessalonians 2:15, but Paul, like His Lord, could hate the sin but still love the sinner.

### Romans 9:3

Now we come to Paul's shocking and unbelievable statement. "**Accursed**" -- this is a very strong word (Greek-"anathema"). It means "cursed, something set apart and devoted for destruction, something dedicated to destruction, something that is doomed to destruction, something accursed and separated from God." See its usage in Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Corinthians 16:22.

"**Wish**" = pray, wish. "**Kinsmen**" = fellow countrymen, members of the same nation." Paul was saying, "I was wishing that I could be destroyed (cursed forever, anathema, separated from Christ and doomed to eternal destruction) so that Israel might be saved." We can imagine an objection: "Paul, I don't believe you. How could anyone say that and really mean it? Do you mean to say that you would be willing to give up heaven and go to hell so that Israel might be saved?" Paul says, "I speak the truth! I lie not!" Apart from Christ Paul could never have said this because it would not have been true (compare verse 1 "I say the truth **in Christ**"). The love and concern that Paul had for Israel was far beyond any human kind of love. It was nothing less than the love of Christ in him. **WHAT PAUL WISHED THAT HE COULD DO WAS THE VERY THING THAT CHRIST ACTUALLY DID!** The Lord Jesus Christ left heaven (2 Cor. 8:9), and actually went to hell (in the sense of being separated from God and punished by God) and was made a CURSE for us (Gal. 3:13). He was SEPARATED from God (Matt. 27:46) and He was PUNISHED by God (Isaiah 53:5,6,10), which is the very essence of hell (see Matthew 25:41,46; 2 Thess. 1:8-9 and notice the two elements of both separation and punishment). He did all of this so that we might be saved! This was indeed "Calvary love." The only way Paul could make such a statement was because his heart was filled with the love of Christ, that very love which actually caused Christ to be ANATHEMA so that we could be SAVED!

We know that Paul could not actually follow through with this wish, even though it was uttered in all sincerity and truth. Why not? 1) **Romans 8:38-39:** If nothing could separate him from God's love, then it was impossible for him to be accursed; 2) There would be no need to do it because Christ has already done it! Instead Paul devoted his life to preaching a gospel about a Saviour who actually went through the fires and judgment of hell to save sinners, and Paul said that if any man does not preach this gospel let him be ANATHEMA (Gal. 1:8-9). How can a person not love that Christ who did that for us? (Compare 1 Cor. 16:22.) (Moses was filled with the love of God and deep grief and concern over his people--Exodus 32:32; and compare Judah in Genesis 44:33 and David's grief in 2 Samuel 18:33.)

### Romans 9:4

Paul identifies his brothers and kinsmen according to the flesh as "Israelites," those who have descended from Jacob whose other name was Israel (Gen. 32:28). By definition a racial Jew is one who can say, "My ancient fathers are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!" Those who cannot say this are Gentiles. Those Jews and Gentiles who have believed on Christ during this present age are members of God's unique organism THE CHURCH (see 1 Cor. 10:32 and 12:12-13).

"**To whom pertaineth**"--Paul wanted the Jews to know what **belonged** to them. God had given them so much!

They were a special nation blessed by God in a unique way (Deut. 7:6-8). To this chosen people belonged numerous benefits and blessings and privileges and advantages. No other nation under heaven has ever been given so much from the hand of God.

One of the benefits and advantages given to Israel was already mentioned by Paul in Romans 3:1-2: God committed and entrusted His Word to these people. The Jews were the custodians of the Word of God. God used certain Jews as His penmen (2 Peter 1:21) and God used many other Jews to copy and transmit His Word, and they did a very careful and remarkable job. In Romans chapter 9 Paul gives a list of eight additional benefits and advantages that belonged to Israel:

### **1) To Israel belonged the ADOPTION.**

The nation Israel had a unique relationship to God. They were given the privilege of SONSHIP. No other nation on earth has ever been addressed by God as "MY SON." Note Exodus 4:22-23, "Israel is my SON, even my FIRSTBORN, and I say unto thee (Pharaoh), Let my SON go, that he may serve me." Just as the firstborn son enjoyed special privilege and rank and position, so Israel enjoyed a privileged position among the nations. Keep in mind that when God spoke the words recorded in Exodus 4:22-23 Israel was nothing but a bunch of slaves in a foreign land! See also Hosea 11:1. God called His Son Israel out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus and hundreds of years later God called His unique Son out of Egypt following the death of Herod the Great--Matthew 2:15. See also Malachi 1:6 (note the Father-Son relationship; the problem was that Israel did not honor their Father). [Please note that Romans 9:4 refers to national adoption which is different from the individual adoption mentioned in Romans 8:15,23.]

### **2) To Israel belonged the GLORY.**

This refers to the visible manifestation of the presence of God. It is the majestic presence or manifestation of God in which He descends to dwell among men. This has been referred to as the Shechinah Glory (**Shechinah** comes from a Hebrew verb meaning *to dwell*). In the Bible it is often referred to as "the glory of the LORD." Most of these manifestations took the form of light, fire or cloud or a combination of these. Here are some examples:

Genesis 15:17 **Smoking furnace and burning lamp** (Abraham)

Exodus 3:1-5 **Burning bush** (Moses)

Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20,24 **Pillar of Cloud and Pillar of Fire** (The Exodus)

Exodus 19:16-20 **Fire, smoke, etc.** (Mt. Sinai)

Exodus 33-34 **A special manifestation to Moses**

Exodus 40:34-38 **Cloud and fire over the tabernacle**; compare 1 Sam. 4:21-22

1 Kings 8:10-11 **Cloud** (God's glory in Solomon's temple)

Luke 2:8-9 **Shining glory** (Bethlehem shepherds)

Matthew 17:1-8 **Brilliance of the transfigured Christ**

God never made known His presence in such a unique way to any other nation. "For what nation is there so great, WHO HATH GOD SO NIGH (NEAR) UNTO THEM?" (Deut. 4:7).

### **3) To Israel belonged the COVENANTS.**

Note the plural. To the other nations belonged only one covenant--the Noachic covenant (Genesis 9:8-17). This

covenant was made between God and all those who would come from Noah and his sons, which would include all peoples of all nations (Genesis 9:8-9). In this covenant God promised to never again destroy the entire earth by a flood (Genesis 9:15) and He promised the perpetuation of the day/night cycle, the seasons, etc. (Genesis 8:21-22).

The other covenants all belonged to Israel and may be listed as follows:

**THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (Genesis 15:7-21; 17:1-14)**

God promised that out of Abraham would come a great nation which would possess the promised land with some definite borders.

**THE MOSAIC COVENANT (Exodus 19:5-8)**

A Conditional, legal covenant which demanded Israel's obedience to God's commands. This is also known as the Old Covenant, and it was this covenant that Israel broke (Jeremiah 31:32).

**THE PALESTINIAN COVENANT (Deuteronomy 29-30).**

This covenant spoke of a world-wide regathering of the Jews and repossession of the land following their dispersion (Deut. 30:1-9).

**THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (2 Samuel 7:5-19; cf. Psalm 89)**

This covenant promised an eternal house (dynasty), an eternal throne, an eternal kingdom and an eternal Person who would be the King, namely Christ, the Son of David.

**THE NEW COVENANT (Jeremiah 31:31-36)**

This covenant spoke of the national regeneration and salvation of Israel, when God's law and God's Spirit would be put in the Jew (cf. Ezekiel 36:26-29) and God's Spirit would be put in His people (Ezekiel 36:27). This covenant is referred to in Romans 11:26-27.

**4) To Israel belonged the GIVING OF THE LAW.**

This was true of no other nation. The Commandments were not given to the Egyptians or the Babylonians or the Persians or the Romans. Israel was privileged to know of God's awesome holiness as revealed in His holy law: "What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?" (Deuteronomy 4:8).

**5) To Israel belonged the SERVICE OF GOD.**

This involved the tabernacle and temple worship under the priesthood which was instituted by God. The word "service" is used in Hebrews 9:1,6,9 where it is used of the priestly service in God's tabernacle. The other nations were ignorant of God (compare John 4:22-23) but to Israel was given the true way to worship and approach God, all of which beautifully pictured the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**6) To Israel belonged the PROMISES.**

These involve the great "I WILL" statements of God. Think of all that God said He would do on behalf of His

people! One example is found in Isaiah 41:8,10--"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend . . . Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I WILL strengthen thee; yea I WILL help thee; yea, I WILL uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." God's great and precious promises to the nation Israel included the promises of the coming Messiah in whom was the nation's hope (Isaiah 2:1-4; 7:14; 9:6-7, 11:1-11; 28:16; etc.).

## **Romans 9:5**

### **7) To Israel belonged the FATHERS.**

In particular this refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were the patriarchs of the nation. Even the God of Israel often identified Himself with these three men (see Exodus 3:6,15).

### **8) To Israel belonged the CHRIST (THE MESSIAH--GOD'S ANOINTED KING!).**

The greatest benefit is saved for last. The greatest Person who was ever born was born a Jew, "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22) because the Saviour is of the Jews, and apart from Him there is no salvation (Acts 4:12). As to His HUMANITY He is an Israelite as concerning the flesh; as to His DEITY He is "OVER ALL (totally sovereign), GOD BLESSED FOREVER" (Romans 9:5).

See the poem **The Jew** - Showing the proper attitude Gentile believers should have towards the Jews

What did Israel do with all of these benefits? Did they take advantage of their advantages? Were they blessed by their blessings? Did they benefit from all their benefits? Herein lies the tragedy. Though there were godly exceptions (Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, etc.) the nation for the most part did not take advantage of what they had. Instead they (1) dishonored and despised God as their Father (Mal. 1:6); (2) they placed no value on the presence of God in their midst; (3) they lost sight of God's covenant commitments; (4) they broke God's law (Jer. 31:32); (5) their worship lost its reality and became an empty ritual; (6) the great promises were not mixed with faith (Heb. 3:18-4:2); (7) they did not follow in the steps of faithful Abraham who believed God (Rom. 4:11-12); and last but most significantly, (8) they crucified their own Messiah (Matthew 27:22; John 19:15-16; 1 Thess. 2:14-15).

Spiritual Principle: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" Luke 12:47-48). The Israelites were given much, and therefore much will be required of them. This principle is also seen in Matthew 11:20-24 and 12:38-42. Those who have been given more will be judged more severely. Judgment given will be according to light received.

***Spiritual Application:*** What has God give to us? What advantages and benefits do we have? What are we doing with what we have been given? Do we have a Bible? (not just the Old Testament but the completed Bible, 66 Books!) What are we doing with the Bible that we have? Has God given us the privilege of being His children (John 1:12)? Has He given us commands to obey and promises to believe? Has He given us examples of godly men and women from the past for us to follow? Have we been given a local church where the true worship of God may take place? What are we doing with His Church? What are we doing with His Word? What are we doing with the Lord Jesus Christ? We need to take advantage of all of our benefits. If we do how blessed we shall be; if we don't WOE UNTO US!

## **Romans 9:5 (THE DEITY OF CHRIST)**

Romans 9:5 is one of the clearest declarations of the full deity of Christ to be found anywhere in the Bible. It stands together with other clear passages which tell us who Jesus Christ really is:

John 20:28---He is LORD and He is GOD!

Titus 2:13---He is the GREAT GOD

Isaiah 9:6---He is the MIGHTY GOD

Romans 9:5---He is the BLESSED GOD

John 1:1---He is the ETERNAL GOD

May we never make Him less than God as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other false cults have done. Religious liberalism has also denied the deity of Christ, emphasizing His humanity as our "great teacher" "perfect example" "important prophet" etc. When such people come to a verse like Romans 9:5 they cannot accept it as it is and thus they try to change its clear meaning. Their method for doing this is explained and exposed in the following article:

# AN EXAMINATION OF ROMANS 9:5

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## A Suggested Method for Evaluating Bible Translations

How can we properly evaluate the multitudinous versions of the Bible? How can we determine whether a modern translation is trustworthy and reliable? Is it possible to examine a version and definitely discover a bias against the Person and work of Christ? These are important questions for those who are deeply concerned that the Bible they hold in their hand and recommend to others best reflects the original God-breathed text.

In recent decades, the King James Bible and the Textus Receptus (the Greek text upon which its New Testament is believed to be based) has been made the standard for many Fundamentalists by which all other English versions are measured and rejected. Almost all of the modern versions or modern translations are based upon a minority of ancient manuscripts which KJV defenders consider to be corrupt manuscripts. This "corruption," they claim, can be detected in passages such as Colossians 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; Luke 2:33,43, when the King James Bible is compared with some of the modern versions. Representative of such KJV defenders are Edward Hills, Terence Brown, David Fuller, Peter Ruckman (holding to a very extreme position), Jack Hyles, Donald Waite, David Cloud, and Pensacola Christian College. Some of these men are convinced that the King James Bible is a perfect and flawless translation which cannot be improved upon, although the King James translators themselves would have strongly objected to this characterization (see the preface to the KJV entitled "The Translators to the Reader" which shows that the KJV translators did not deem their work to be perfect or infallible).

Regarded as a "close cousin" to the Textus Receptus, the Majority Text (also



designated as the Byzantine family of manuscripts) has been presented by a small group of scholars as preserving the original text of the New Testament even better than the Textus Receptus. Some representatives of this line of thinking are John William Burgon, Arthur Farstad, Zane Hodges, Alfred Martin, and Wilbur Pickering.

On the other side of the debate, there are many Bible-believing, conservative scholars who do not believe the Textus Receptus should be made the absolute standard for determining the trustworthiness of a translation. We could think of Benjamin Warfield, Charles Hodge, A.T. Robertson<sup>1</sup>, Henry Alford, C.I. Scofield<sup>2</sup>, just to name a few. Thus, an evaluation of versions on the basis of the underlying Greek text can become a very divisive issue, even among those who strongly hold to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> **[Note: For a helpful article on what the historic, fundamentalist position is on Bible translations, see Robert L. Sumner's booklet, "Bible Translations," published by *Biblical Evangelism*.]**

I would like to suggest another possible method for evaluating translations and one which should find all Bible-believers in hearty agreement. This is by no means a new method. After the Revised Standard Version was published nearly 30 years ago, conservative, Bible-believers were almost unanimous in their opposition to this translation. Why was this so? Their united opposition, for the most part, was not due to the underlying Greek text. Rather, it was because of certain key verses (such as Isaiah 7:14) where the translation clearly revealed the liberal bias and unbelief of the translators. Let us now consider one such verse and see if it really serves as a good test for evaluating versions.

Romans 9:5 is one of the clearest affirmations of the deity of Christ found in the Bible. In no uncertain terms Paul declares that Christ, who came out of Israel according to the flesh, is none other than the One who is OVER ALL, GOD BLESSED FOREVER!

Modern scholarship, however, has made every effort to circumvent the obvious implications of such a statement, and to do so they have played an ingenious game of repunctuation.<sup>4</sup> They have cleverly placed a period after "Christ" (...Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever!) or after "over all" (...Christ, who is over all. God be blessed forever!), but in either case they have made the doxology refer not to Christ, but to God the Father. If we allow such punctuation, then the King James rendering becomes dubious and Romans 9:5 can no longer be used as a proof-text for the deity of Christ.

Is the punctuation of this verse dependent on the whim of the translator? Is there any sure way of knowing which rendering is correct? Indeed, when Romans 9:5 is objectively examined in light of the rules of context, language, usage and grammar, the reverent interpreter can safely arrive at only one conclusion. Consider the following facts:

1) As any interlinear Greek-English Testament would reveal, the Greek text could literally be translated as follows: "and out of whom the Christ (came) according to the flesh the One who is over all God blessed forever Amen." How would you punctuate

this sentence (I have deliberately omitted any punctuation)?

2) According to a parallel passage in Romans 1:3-4, we would expect Paul to say something about the deity of Christ in Romans 9:5. In Romans 1:3-4 Paul said (permit me to paraphrase), "As to His humanity He is of the seed of David, but as to His deity, He is the unique Son of God!" Likewise in Romans 9:5, "As to His humanity He came out of Israel, but as to His deity, He is over all, God blessed forever!" Or, as Hodge has written, "Christ, according to the flesh, was an Israelite, but, according to His higher nature, the supreme God."<sup>5</sup> We would expect such an antithesis.

3) There are two other places where the expression "blessed forever" is used by Paul:

i. **Romans 1:25**: ". . . the Creator, who is blessed forever"

Who is "blessed forever"? THE CREATOR!

ii. **2 Corinthians 11:31**: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed forever"

Who is "blessed forever"? THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

Thus, if we follow the same pattern:

**Romans 9:5**: ". . . Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever"

Who is "God blessed forever"? CHRIST WHO IS OVER ALL!

Thus according to Pauline usage, the doxology would have to refer to Christ!

4) The liberal translators have no real precedent for making "God be blessed" an independent doxology. The standard form for doxologies in both the Old and New Testaments (and in other ancient literature) is almost always "Blessed be God" not "God be blessed." Compare 1 Kings 8:15,56; Ephesians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; etc.

5) "The interpretation that refers the passage to Christ suits the structure of the sentence, whereas the interpretation that takes the words as an asyndetic (disconnected, independent) doxology to God the Father is awkward and unnatural."<sup>6</sup> A. T. Robertson, the distinguished grammarian, agrees: "To start a new sentence for the doxology is very abrupt and awkward."<sup>7</sup>

6) The church Fathers were almost unanimous in understanding the passage as referring to Christ.<sup>8</sup>

7) Finally, if the evidence is so overwhelmingly in favor of referring the words "God

blessed” to Christ, why do so many modern scholars want to translate it differently? Their principal argument is a real shocker! They say that nowhere else in his “genuine” epistles does Paul ever designate Christ as God: “It seems tantamount to impossible that Paul would have expressed Christ’s greatness by calling him God blessed for ever.”<sup>9</sup> Do you discern somewhat of a bias here? Apparently such unbelieving critics have never read what Paul said about Christ in Titus. 2:13<sup>10</sup> or Colossians 2:9 or Philippians 2:6 (“equal with God”)!

In conclusion, let me cite the words of Charles Hodge and Henry Alford who both affirm that the expression “God blessed” can only refer to Christ: “There is but one interpretation of this important passage which can, with the least regard to the rules of construction, be maintained.”<sup>11</sup> “The rendering given above (pointing to the deity of Christ) is then not only that most agreeable to the usage of the Apostle, **but the only one admissible by the rules of grammar and arrangement**” (emphasis his).<sup>12</sup>

Now that we have determined the correct rendering of Romans 9:5, let’s use this key verse as a criterion by which we can evaluate various Bible translations:

## ROMANS 9:5

CORRECT TRANSLATION	INCORRECT TRANSLATION	
	"God" refers to God the Father	
"God" refers to Christ <i>Christ's Deity Declared!</i>  "...Christ who is over all, God blessed forever!"	<i>Incorrect Variation #1</i>	<i>Incorrect Variation #2</i>
	"...Christ who is over all. God be blessed forever!"	"...Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever!"
King James Bible-1611 (Authorized Version)		
New American Standard Bible 1960		
The Amplified Bible		
An Expanded Translation (Kenneth Wuest)		
The Christian Counselor's New Testament (Jay Adams)		
The Jerusalem Bible-1966		
The New King James Bible 1979		

Revised Version-1881	<i>Revised Version Footnote<sup>13</sup></i>	<i>Revised Version Footnote<sup>13</sup></i>
New International Version 1973	<i>New International Version Footnote</i>	<i>New International Version Footnote</i>
	The Living Bible (Ken Taylor's Paraphrase)	
<i>Revised Standard Version Footnote</i>		Revised Standard Version 1952
<i>New English Bible Footnote</i>		New English Bible
<i>Today's English Version Footnote</i>		Today's English Version (Good News For Modern Man <u>or</u> Good News Bible)
New Living Translation-1995 (new revision of The Living Bible)		<i>New Living Translation Footnote</i>
Holman Christian Standard Bible (1999)		<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible Footnote</i>
Net Bible	The Net Bible recognizes these other possibilities in the footnote, but argues strongly that it is best to take this as an affirmation of Christ's deity.	
English Standard Version (ESV)		
		New World Translation (Jehovah's Witnesses)

## OBSERVATIONS:

- 1) Beware of an orthodox translation accompanied by an heretical or unorthodox footnote in small print.
- 2) The versions which resulted from liberal scholarship all seem to recognize in their footnotes the possibility and even the validity of the correct rendering.
- 3) The New World Translation can serve as a “control” since we already know that the Jehovah’s Witnesses have a strong bias against the deity of Christ.

Obviously, one verse is not a sufficient criterion with which to condemn or condone an entire translation. It would also be helpful to use other key verses which, together with Romans 9:5, could serve as “test verses” to very quickly examine a new translation and discover the absence or presence of a liberal bias. I would suggest Isaiah 7:14 (“the virgin”); Psalm 2:12 (“kiss the Son”), Titus 2:13 (anyone who discounts the Granville Sharp rule, which links "the great God"

with "our Saviour Jesus Christ," does so for strictly theological reasons), 2 Timothy 3:16 (placement of the supplied "is"), and Psalm 22:16 (see the absurd rendering of the NEB).

Perhaps you could suggest others. Our desire in all of this is to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Only then can we please the Christ who died for us, the One who is over all, God blessed forever!

George Zeller (originally published in the *Voice Magazine*, IFCA, July/August 1979 and has since been revised and updated)

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Authored a textbook on textual criticism.

<sup>2</sup> Read Scofield's "Introduction" in the original *Scofield Reference Bible*.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that the issue of the underlying Greek text is unimportant. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus may have been one of the first to play this game. See Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, editor, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>7</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>8</sup> Metzger, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. This amazing statement is made even after giving five conclusive reasons as to why the minority of the Committee preferred to understand the expression as referring to Christ. See also James Denny, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in the *Expositor's Greek Testament* on Romans 9:5 where a similar heretical statement is made.

<sup>10</sup> See Metzger on Romans 9:5 where we read in the footnote, "Titus 2:13 is generally regarded as deutero-Pauline."

<sup>11</sup> Hodge, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>12</sup> *Alford's Greek Testament*, see on Romans 9:5.

<sup>13</sup>The footnote is prefaced by "some modern interpreters . . ." This is one place where the Revisers did not appeal to the "ancient authorities"!

**[end of article]**

Before leaving the subject of the deity of Christ, it is profitable to read what C.S.Lewis had to say about the remarkable claims made by Jesus Himself:

Among the Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time... One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic... He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This make sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history.

Yet (and this is the strange, significant thing) even His enemies, when they read the gospels, do not usually get the impression of silliness and conceit. Still less do unprejudiced readers. Christ says that He is "humble and meek" and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.

***(Lunatic, Liar Or Lord)***

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of thing Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

*(Mere Christianity, Book 2, end of chapter 3)*

*(Note: The above quotation is shared because the author makes an excellent point and says it very well. Use of this quotation is not intended to be an endorsement of C.S. Lewis or of any of his teachings found elsewhere.)*

**Romans 9:6**

**The Promises:** God has given wonderful promises to the Israelites in His Word. He promised them the land (Gen. 15:18; 17:8). He promised that out of Abraham would come a great nation (Gen. 12:2) which would never cease to be a nation before God (Jer. 31:36-37). He promised a future kingdom age when there would be justice in all the earth (Jer. 23:5) and peace throughout all the world (Micah 4:3). He promised the Israelites that He would make a new covenant with them which would include the forgiveness of sins and a unique relationship with God (Jer. 31:31-34 and see Ezekiel 36:24-29). Most importantly they would enjoy the personal presence of Jehovah Himself (Jehovah Jesus) in their midst (Isaiah 33:17,22; Ezekiel 48:35; Jer. 23:5-6).

**The Problem:** At the time when Paul wrote to the Romans the great majority of Jews were rejecting Christ and rejecting the gospel. The gospel Paul preached made it very clear that those who reject Christ are damned and doomed for eternity, and this includes unbelieving Jews. The gospel was reaching out more and more to Gentile

nations. When the church first began it was composed of Jewish believers (Acts 2) but as time went on more and more Gentiles were saved and became a part of the body of Christ. Thus we have a problem: What about the Jews who refuse to believe in Christ? What about the many Jews who will face the wrath of God for rejecting Christ and who will never participate in the promised kingdom? IF GOD HAS PROMISED ALL THESE THINGS TO THE ISRAELITES, WHY WILL MANY JEWS NEVER SEE THE FULFILLMENT OF THESE PROMISES? Has God failed to keep His Word?

**"Taken none effect"**=failed. God's Word *has not failed!* God's promises to Israel will never fall to the ground unfulfilled (Joshua 21:45). God has never and will never break any of the promises which He made to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. BUT IF GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE FACT THAT MANY JEWS WILL NEVER SEE THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES? Paul explains by giving a principle: **They are not all Israel which are of (out of) Israel.** They are not all Israel who are (descended) from Israel. Just because you have come out of Israel (that is, you are a descendant of Jacob) does not make you a true Israelite. Just because you are a Jew does not make you a true Jew. Just because you are a Jew outwardly does not make you a Jew inwardly (Rom. 2:28-29). Just because you have been circumcised outwardly does not mean that you have been circumcised in the heart (Rom. 2:28-29).

### Romans 9:7

Paul now begins to illustrate the principle that you can descend from someone very important and yet not be blessed by God and not be a recipient of God's promises. It is interesting to notice that Paul first goes to the book of Genesis, illustrating his point from the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. He expects the reader to be very familiar with the book of Genesis. Later in the chapter he will use the example of Pharaoh, thus assuming that the reader has mastered the contents of Exodus. Later in this chapter he will quote from Hosea and Isaiah and he assumes that the reader is familiar with these books. Remember, in the book of Romans Paul quotes from the Old Testament approximately 60 times! It is very tragic that with all the Bibles in circulation today in America, most people are so ignorant of the Bible. For most people (even church-going people) most of the pages of Scripture are very unfamiliar territory. When you open the Bible, do you find yourself in a strange, unknown territory or do you find yourself in a place that is familiar and very well known? May God help us to be more and more at home in His Word!

Consider verse 7--Isaac was not the only son of Abraham. Ishmael was the first son born to Abraham and Isaac was born years later. Thus Abraham had two children (two who were of the seed of Abraham) but only one of those children could really say, "I am a true child of Abraham." Physically they were both Abraham's children, but in the spiritual realm God chose only one of those sons to be the one who would receive the blessings and the promises (see Genesis 17:19-21; 21:12).

In the days of Christ the Jews took great pride in being children of Abraham (see Matthew 3:9; John 8:33,37,39,44). The Jews thought that all who came out of Abraham were blessed and recipients of the promises. They mistakenly thought that all who descended from Israel were (true) Israel. They failed to realize that a true Jew must have four FATHERS--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob **and GOD!** Compare the Ishmaelites (modern day Arabs) who can claim Abraham as their father. Compare the descendants of Esau (Edomites) who can claim both Abraham and Isaac. Compare the unbelieving Jews in the days of Christ who claimed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (all three) as their fathers; but the problem was that God was not their father (John 8:42). You need all four to qualify as a true Jew: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and GOD. A person becomes properly related to God only by personal faith!

### Romans 9:8-9

Ishmael was a child of the flesh; Isaac was the child of promise (see Galatians 4:22-23,28). The birth of Ishmael was natural (Genesis 16). It came about not because Abraham listened to God but because he listened to his wife. It was a fleshly attempt to try to help God keep His promise. The result was Ishmael, the child of the flesh. The birth of Isaac was supernatural (Gen. 18:14). It was a miraculous birth--God did it! God kept His promise in a remarkable way! Isaac was the child of promise. The point Paul was making is this: Abraham had two sons but only one of these sons partook of the covenant promises and became part of the chosen line which would blossom

into a great nation and out of whom the Messiah would come. Count Isaac in; count Ishmael out!

### Romans 9:10

Here is another example which is even more amazing. In the case of Abraham's sons there were different mothers and different births. In the case of Isaac's sons there was the same mother, the same father ("**conceived by one, even by our father Isaac**") and the same birth. It was one birth and two children (twins). The firstborn was rejected and the second born was chosen (v.12-13). If man were doing the choosing then Esau would have been chosen because the firstborn son was usually the preferred son and Esau was certainly favored by his father (see Gen. 25:28). But the choice belonged to God not to man.

### Romans 9:11-12

See Genesis 25:23. When her two sons were still in the womb and not yet born, God spoke to Rebecca and said, "The elder (firstborn Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)." God chose the younger (the lesser) and He did not choose the older (the greater), and by that choice He made the lesser the greater! This choice was made before the sons were born and before they had done any good or evil. God's purpose according to election (according to His choosing) must *STAND* (remain, abide, stand firm, remain unchangeable). What is the basis for God's election (God's choice)? It is "not of works." Election is not of works, not of merit, not of desert (you are not chosen because you deserve to be chosen). It is not based upon works. God's election is "of Him that calleth." It is based upon God Himself. The reason for the choice made is found in the Chooser, not in the one chosen. Thus Isaac had two children but only one of those children could really say, "I am a true child of Abraham and Isaac!" Physically they both were but in the spiritual realm God chose only one to receive the blessings and the promises.

### Romans 9:13

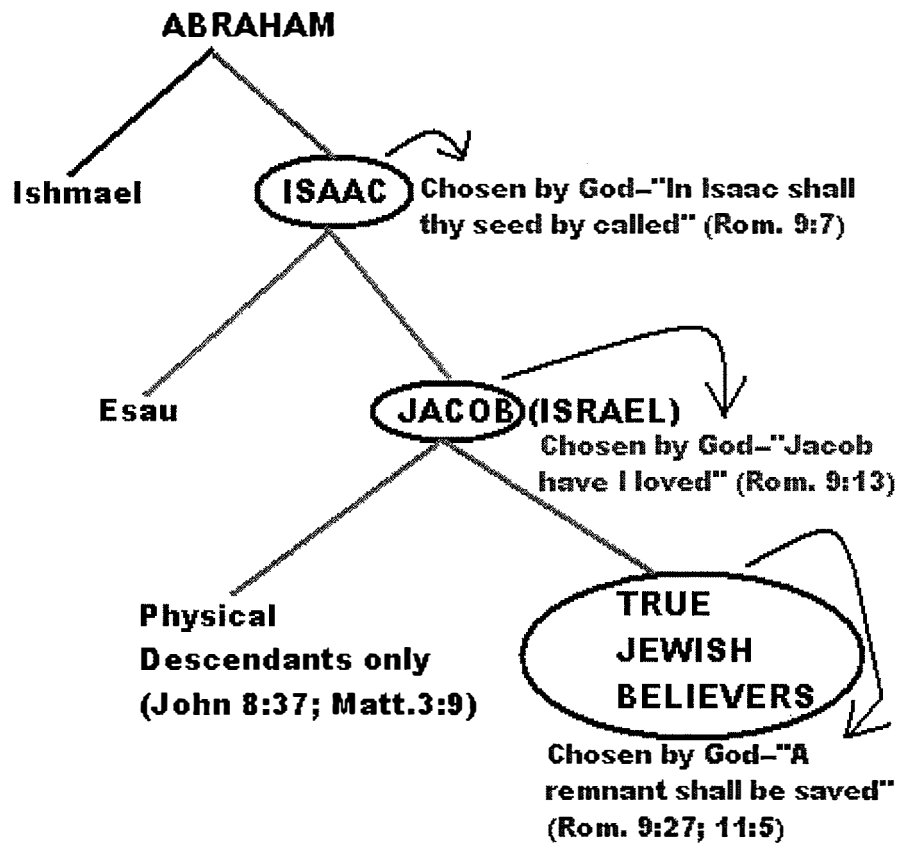
We find this quotation in Malachi 1:2-3. God is the One speaking and it is a very strong statement. A woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, "I can't understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob." Indeed Jacob was quite a rascal! So it is with all men. The amazing thing is not that men are lost and bound for hell, because this is what we all deserve. The amazing thing is that anyone is saved and bound for heaven! God's judgment is not amazing because it is exactly what we have earned. It's God's grace which is so amazing: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." See Psalm 5:5 and compare v.4 (it's amazing that anyone is allowed into God's presence). How can we understand the word "hate" in Malachi 1:2-3? Compare Luke 14:26 with Matthew 10:37 (our love for the Lord must be so great that our love for anyone else becomes as hatred in comparison). Another very helpful passage is Genesis 29:16-18,30,33. Jacob chose Rachel. He chose her to be his marriage partner. He chose to love her. Leah was hated in the sense that she was *not chosen*. The issue in Romans chapter 9 is this: WHOM HAS GOD CHOSEN? Paul's main point is this: They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel. Within Israel there is a special group known as elect Israel (true Israel, believing Israel). Thus ELECTION is the subject at hand. Thus for God to say, "I hate Esau" means "I have not chosen Esau." To say, "I love Jacob" means "I have chosen Jacob and my promises and blessings will be fulfilled in him and in his seed after him."

**PRINCIPLE =THEY ARE NOT ALL ISRAEL WHICH ARE OF (OUT OF) ISRAEL**

**PAUL'S ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Continued on the Next Page





**Application:** Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today are the children of Abraham (the seed of Abraham). See Galatians 3:9,26,29 and Romans 4:11-12,16. Abraham is the father of all the faithful (all believers whether Jews or Gentiles). Believing Gentiles are spiritual descendants of Abraham but not physical descendants. Believing Jews are physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham. Unbelieving Jews are physical but not spiritual descendants of Abraham. Unbelieving Gentiles bear no relationship to Abraham whatsoever. What is your relationship to Abraham?

### Romans 9:14

Paul anticipates an objection: "How can God choose one person and not choose another person? That's not fair!" This leads to the key question: "IS THERE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD?" (In the Greek this question demands a negative answer.) "**Unrighteousness**" =wickedness, injustice, wrong action or wrong decision, being unjust or unfair. Is there unrighteousness (unfairness) with God? Perish the thought! (God forbid!) God is perfectly righteous and fair and just in all that He does. There is unrighteousness with Esau and with Jacob and with each of us, but not with God. UNRIGHTEOUSNESS is with man, not with God (see Romans 1:18,29; 2:8; 3:5; 6:13 where this same word "unrighteousness" is found; compare also Romans 3:10). Settle it once and for all: **THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH WILL DO RIGHT** (see Genesis 18:25). If God were to be unfair He would cease to be God! The Righteous God can do no wrong!

If God were to operate on the basis of man's works or human merit or human desert (what man deserves to receive from God) or if God were to operate on the basis of absolute justice, THEN NONE OF US WOULD MAKE IT! We all deserve God's wrath and judgment. We all deserve God's hell. If God were to send EVERY ONE OF US to the lake of fire forever HE WOULD BE PERFECTLY FAIR AND JUST because this is what every one of us deserves (Romans 6:23a; Romans 1:32; 1:18). The amazing thing is not that God saves some, but **that God is merciful to any!** The amazing thing is not that many are judged but that any are justified! The amazing thing is not that God hated Esau, but that God loved Jacob! Those who ponder the mysteries of God's election should never cease to marvel and be thankful that God, in His infinite mercy and grace, has chosen some: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from

the beginning CHOSEN YOU to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

### Romans 9:15

Here we learn of God's marvelous mercy (pity) and compassion. The sovereign God pours out His mercy on some ("on whom I will have mercy"). **Objection:** "But why doesn't God pour out His mercy on all?" But the objector has missed the whole point. The real question is this: "Why does God pour out His mercy on anybody? None of us deserve the mercy of God. We don't even deserve one drop of God's mercy!" If God were to show no mercy at all and pour out His judgment on every single person He would be absolutely fair because this is exactly what every single person deserves. The amazing thing is that God shows mercy toward anyone! The amazing thing is that anyone is saved!

Paul is quoting from Exodus 33:19 and it is important to understand the context of this passage. In Exodus chapter 32 the children of Israel quickly and wickedly turned aside out of the way which God commanded them (v.8) and made a golden calf in violation of the second commandment. The people were guilty and they all deserved to be judged and destroyed (see Exodus 32:10--God could have righteously destroyed them all!). It is amazing that only 3000 died (Ex.32:28). Compare the concern of Moses for his people (Ex.32:32) with the concern Paul had for the Jews (Rom. 9:1-3). May we never cease to marvel at the great mercies of our God (Exodus 34:5-7) and may we, like Moses, bow our head and worship Him (Ex.34:8), saying, "Lord, there is no unrighteousness with You!"

### Romans 9:16

This verse is speaking of the bestowal of God's mercy: "...God that sheweth mercy." On what basis does God bestow His mercy? Notice what the verse says, "It is **not** of him . . . nor of him ... BUT OF GOD." It is NOT OF MAN but it is OF GOD! Compare John 1:13.

"**It is not of him that willeth**"=it does not depend on man's desire or wish or will;

"**Nor of him that runneth**"=it does not depend on man's effort (strenuous effort and exertion).

The bestowal of God's mercy does not depend on human will and effort. It depends on God, on the One who said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Remember, no one deserves mercy. We deserve wrath (Eph. 2:3-5). But God is RICH in mercy (compare Rom.10:12).

### Romans 9:17 (a quotation of Exodus 9:16 and compare Exodus 14:4)

Here we have the example of Pharaoh, a man famous for his stubborn and hard heart and his sinful refusal to do what God said. Here was a man who did not obtain mercy but whose heart was hardened (Rom.9:18b). But before we condemn Pharaoh for his wickedness we need to remember that we all have Pharaoh-like hearts (Jer. 17:9). All the children of Adam are corrupt (Psalm 14:1-3) and are totally depraved (Rom. 3:9-19).

"**Shew**"=demonstrate, exhibit, prove, manifest, display (compare Rom. 9:22 and Eph. 2:6-7). God had a purpose in raising up Pharaoh. God wanted to SHOW AND EXHIBIT HIS POWER and God wanted to DECLARE HIS NAME throughout all the earth. The salvation of sinners is very important to God (1 Tim. 1:15; John 3:17, etc.) but it is not all-important to God. The one thing God is concerned about more than anything else is HIS OWN GLORY (the demonstration, manifestation and revelation of WHO HE IS!). See our paper, **The Glory of God and Evangelism.**

Through Pharaoh God was able to make Himself known in a marvelous way. Pharaoh was a very powerful ruler and his reputation extended far and wide. The Egyptian kingdom was unrivaled in many respects.

"**Declared throughout**"=announced throughout; proclaimed far and wide. Because of God's dealing with Pharaoh the heathen world learned something of the power of the God of Israel (see Josh. 2:9-10; 1 Sam. 4:7-8).

**Romans 9:18**

"So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (NASB). It is God who shows mercy; it is God who hardens the heart (the verb means "to make hard or dry"). The same sun that melts the butter also hardens the clay. "He who is pardoned cannot say it was because he was better than others; while he who is condemned must acknowledge that he receives nothing more than the just recompense of his sins" (Hodge). Those who are lost have only themselves to blame; those who are saved have only God to thank. Man gets all the blame (and he deserves it); God gets all the credit (and He deserves it!). God gets all the glory (1 Cor. 1:29-31)!

As we think about God's dealing with Pharaoh, we need to keep several things in mind:

- 1) God was not unfair with Pharaoh because there is never any unrighteousness with God (Rom. 9:14);
- 2) God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; Rom. 9:17-18);
- 3) Pharaoh hardened his own heart repeatedly (Exodus 8:32);
- 4) God was extremely longsuffering with Pharaoh (Rom. 9:22). Pharaoh repeatedly said "NO" to God but God waited and gave him additional opportunities (if you or I had been God we would have probably destroyed this man much sooner!);
- 5) God was glorified in this man (Exodus 9:16; 14:4).

**Romans 9:19**

Paul anticipates another objection: "Why then does God still find fault and blame us? For who can resist and withstand His will?" (Amplified) If God hardens us then why does He blame us for being hard? "**Resist**" = oppose, stand against. We can imagine Pharaoh saying, "How can God blame me? I'm just doing God's will and I'm bringing glory to God."

**Romans 9:20**

It is interesting that Paul does not really answer the objection but instead he shows what our true heart attitude should be before the Lord. In Romans chapter 9 Paul is dealing with doctrines that are very difficult to understand (God's purpose according to election-v.11; God's sovereign bestowal of mercy-v.15-16; God showing mercy on some and hardening others-v.18, etc.). There is only one way to understand these things. We must assume our proper place before God (compare Exodus 34:8--Moses bowed his head and worshipped). We must realize who we are. We are not only frail creatures of the dust, but we are fallen, depraved creatures as well. Only as we humble ourselves and bow our head before our Maker will we be ready to learn of God's sovereign dealing with sinful men who deserve nothing but God's wrath and judgment.

What right does man have to reply against God? Does man know more than his Maker? Is the creature wiser than the Creator? Who are we to question the rightness of what God does? Who are we to cast doubt upon His fairness? The potter has every right to take a lump of clay and make it into whatever vessel he chooses and the vessel has no right to utter forth an objection.

See Isaiah 29:16 where the prophet shows how absurd it is for the piece of pottery to deny that he has been made ("He made me not") or to foolishly say that the potter has no understanding ("He knows nothing"--NIV). See

Isaiah 45:9 where the prophet shows how foolish it would be for a piece of pottery to strive or quarrel with his maker. Compare Jeremiah 18:1-6.

### Romans 9:21

"**Power**"=authority, right. The question expects an affirmative answer. YES, God does have every right to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour. "**Lump**"=the dough-like mixture from which the potter forms his wares. "**Clay**" = refers to sinful, fallen humanity (God does not make a man a sinner). As Alva McClain has said,

Paul is not talking about the creation of man. God created man good, holy, and righteous, but the clay that the apostle is talking about here is sinful clay. Out of that clay every man stands alike. Every man is a sinner, every man deserves judgment. God has a right to pick out one man from that mass and have mercy upon him.

"**Vessel**"=piece of pottery, jar, dish, etc. Compare 2 Tim. 2:20 which speaks also of vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor. In a king's palace could be a vessel or vase to hold beautiful flowers and another vessel to hold maggot infested garbage. Another vessel could be used for carrying water and another for carrying off dung or refuse. The potter has every right to make different kinds of vessels for different purposes.

### Romans 9:22

"**Willing**"=desirous (this is what God wants); "**to show**"=to demonstrate (same word as in v.17). God desires to display and exhibit **HIS WRATH** (see Romans 1:18). The word "**wrath**" refers to God's severe and divine displeasure against sin. It is not a mere outburst of anger but a settled, permanent state of anger against sin; a holy wrath and indignation. These vessels of wrath (referring to those who enter eternity in an unsaved state) will demonstrate God's holiness and righteousness and perfect justice [compare Rev. 16:5--"Thou art righteous (just) O Lord...because Thou hast JUDGED thus"]. "**Make known**"=reveal. God delights in revealing Himself and making Himself known. Pharaoh certainly came to know God's power and God's judgments (compare Exodus 5:2 when Pharaoh said, "I know not the LORD." God proceeded to make Himself known to this man in a very dramatic way.) All men will come to know God either as JUDGE or as SAVIOUR.

Notice how merciful God was even toward these vessels of destruction. "**Endured**" = bore patiently with, put up with. "**Longsuffering**"=slow to anger, long before getting angry. God was very patient with Pharaoh and with many other unbelievers throughout the pages of history. God's good and patient dealing with those who refuse to repent is also seen in Romans 2:4-5. See also our paper, **God's Willingness and Man's Unwillingness**.

"**Fitted to destruction**"--These vessels of wrath are perfectly suited for the destruction which is deservedly theirs. "**Fitted**"=fit, prepared, ready, ripe for destruction, deserving destruction. "**Prepared for destruction**" (NKJV, NASB, NIV). "**Ripe for destruction**" (Amplified). There are some who understand the verb in the middle voice, "having prepared themselves for destruction" (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich). Vine--"here the middle voice signifies that those referred to fitted themselves for destruction" (see also McClain in *Romans*). It does not say that God so fitted them (contrast with verse 23 where it clearly says that **God afore prepared**). Concerning the so-called "doctrine of reprobation" see under Romans 9:23.

What does Paul mean when he says that these persons are "fitted for destruction"? This is illustrated in the case of Pharaoh.

God did not make him wicked and obdurate; but as a punishment for his sin, He so dealt with him that the EVIL OF HIS NATURE revealed itself in a form, and under circumstances, which made him a fit object of the punitive justice of God (Hodge).

Think of it this way: How can a man be made evil? Nothing needs to be done! He already is evil and if left to himself he will in time fully reveal the sinfulness of his heart and how deserving he is of the judgment of God. How can a man be made good and fit for heaven? This is impossible apart from the grace of God and the God of

grace. Man does not need God in order to be wicked. Man does need God in order to be good. Man could never be good apart from God. There was once a gospel tract with these words on its cover: "WHAT MUST I DO TO BE LOST?" When opened up, the inside was blank!

"**Destruction**" = eternal destruction, being ruined and lost forever, punished and perishing forever. The word is used in Matthew 7:13; Phil. 1:28 (perdition); 3:19; 1 Timothy 6:9; Hebrews 10:39; 2 Peter 2:1; 3:7 (perdition) and elsewhere.

### Romans 9:23

The vessels of mercy have the hope and expectancy of a glorious future, and God will use these vessels to make known WHO HE IS (His glorious Person--His mercy, goodness and grace!). "**Afore prepared**" = pre-prepared, prepared beforehand, made ready beforehand. In Ephesians 2:10 the same verb is used to refer to the good works which God "before ordained" (prepared beforehand) that we should walk in them. Compare also Matthew 25:34--"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

This verse makes it very clear that it was GOD who prepared beforehand these vessels unto glory (in contrast to verse 22 where it does **not** say that God fitted the vessels of wrath to destruction).

## Does the Bible teach REPROBATION?

The doctrine of election is clearly taught in the Word of God: "God hath from the beginning chosen you (believers in Christ) unto salvation" (2 Thess.2:13; compare also Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Col. 3:12; etc.). Since election is taught, men have wrongly assumed and reasoned that the opposite must be true also. In other words, if God has chosen some unto salvation then it must also be true that God has chosen others unto damnation. The opposite of election has been called "REPROBATION," the doctrine that certain people are foreordained to damnation or chosen ahead of time to damnation. To some this may appear reasonable and logical, BUT IT IS NOT BIBLICAL! Here are three examples from Scripture showing that REPROBATION is not a Biblical doctrine:

1. **Romans 9:22-23.** In verse 23 we are told that HE (God) prepared beforehand the vessels of mercy unto glory. If REPROBATION were true then we might expect verse 22 to read something like this: "the vessels of wrath which HE (God) fitted to destruction." This is not what the text says.
2. **Compare Matthew 25:34 with Matthew 25:41.** The kingdom was prepared by God for the righteous from the foundation of the world (v.34). If REPROBATION were true then we should expect the opposite to be stated in verse 41. We would expect to read, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared (by God) for YOU." No, the eternal fire was not prepared for man, but for the devil and his angels.
3. **2 Thessalonians 2:10-13.** Note that in v.13 we have a clear statement of the glorious doctrine of election (for which Paul gave much thanks). Verse 10 speaks of "them that perish." Why do they perish? If REPROBATION were true we would expect Paul to say, ". . .because God has *not* chosen them to salvation." This is not what verse 10 says. They are damned, not because they were chosen by God to damnation but because they "believed not the truth" (v.12).

C. H. Mackintosh, the highly esteemed Brethren writer, argues in a similar fashion:

**It is deeply interesting to mark the way in which Scripture guards against the repulsive doctrine of reprobation. Look, for example, at Matthew 25:34. Here, the King, in addressing those on His right hand, says, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Contrast with this the address to those on His left hand (v.41): 'Depart from Me ye cursed [He does not say 'of My Father'] into everlasting fire, prepared [not for you, but] for the devil and his angels.' So also, in Romans 9. In speaking of the "vessels of wrath," it says "fitted to destruction"--fitted not by God surely, but by**

**themselves. On the other hand, when speaking of the "vessels of mercy," it says, "which *He had afore prepared* unto glory." The grand truth of *election* is fully established; the repulsive error of *reprobation*, sedulously avoided (*The Mackintosh Treasury*, p. 606 footnote).**

We need to be very careful not to embrace some teaching just because it might seem to make sense or be reasonable or logical. The only sure test of any doctrine is this: "WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?" (Rom.4:3). If it is Biblical then we are responsible to believe it, whether it makes sense or not, whether we understand it or not, or whether it seems reasonable or not. The Bible makes it very clear that **THOSE WHO ARE SAVED AND HEAVEN-BOUND HAVE ONLY GOD TO THANK** and **THOSE WHO ARE LOST AND DAMNED HAVE ONLY THEMSELVES TO BLAME**.

**Those who are saved have only God to thank:** See 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 (God must get all the credit); Ephesians 2:8-9 (there is no basis for boasting); Matthew 16:16-17 (Peter did not open his own eyes); John 6:44-45,65 (no one can come to the Saviour apart from supernatural enabling). **Those who are lost have only themselves to blame:** 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all men to be saved); Romans 10:12-13 (God is rich unto all that call upon Him); Matthew 23:37 (God was willing; man was unwilling); John 5:40 (the reason man does not have eternal life is because of his stubborn and sinful REFUSAL to come to the only Saviour); 2 Thess.1:8-9 (those who suffer eternal punishment are those who DISOBEYED the good news of the gospel). Man must take full blame and responsibility for his eternal destination.

The saved person thankfully says, "I'M IN HEAVEN BECAUSE OF GOD!" The lost person must truthfully say, "I'M IN HELL BECAUSE OF ME!" Those who are damned will never be able to blame God or say, "I'm damned because GOD DID NOT CHOOSE ME!" Their damnation is based not upon God's rejection of them but upon THEIR REJECTION OF GOD: "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "Of sin, because they believe not on Me" (John 16:9). "And still you are not willing (but refuse) to come to Me, so that you might have life" (John 5:40--Amplified Bible).

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. It is the work of God, "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph.2:8-9). God does not contribute to man's unbelief. That is man's work. God alone must do the saving. Man must do the believing. God must get all the glory and all the credit. Unbelieving man must take the blame. "To God be the glory great things HE HATH DONE!" "Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!"

## **Romans 9:24**

Who are these vessels of mercy? "**EVEN US!**" The vessels of mercy are those whom God has called (see Romans 8:28,30). The CHURCH is God's CALLED OUT ASSEMBLY (ekklesia) made up of both Jews and Gentiles (compare Rom. 3:29).

Keep in mind the historical background. The book of Romans was penned by Paul about 56 A.D. which was about 25 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. The majority of Jews were not responding to the gospel (Rom.11:28). A very small minority of Jews had put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, including Paul. When the church first began, the membership was entirely Jewish (Acts 2). In Acts chapter 10 the first Gentiles were saved and entered the church. As time went on more and more non-Jews (Gentiles) came to Christ, and before long the majority of Christians were Gentiles. Saved Jews soon became a minority group in the churches. Today a believing Jew is a rarity. In the days when Paul wrote to the Romans this posed quite a problem: If the Jews are God's chosen people (Romans 9:1-5), then why are so few being saved? "Has God cast away His people?" (See Romans 11:1.) In Romans 9:24 Paul is helping them to understand that in this present age God's chosen people are those whom He has called "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles."

There are some who believe that the church is the "TRUE ISRAEL." However, notice that Paul did not say, "Even us, whom he hath called, the TRUE JEWS, the TRUE ISRAEL, made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles." No, in God's Church there is neither Jew nor Gentile (see Colossians 3:10-11; Galatians 6:15). See our paper, [The Use of the Term "Israel" in the N.T.](#)

### **Romans 9:25-26 (these verses focus upon the Gentiles mentioned in 9:24)**

What right do the Gentiles have to be God's people? Why should they be included in God's special called-out assembly, the church? In the past the Gentiles have not been God's people. The Jews have been God's people. How can God let a people be His people when previously they had no real and right relationship to God at all?

Paul answers this by quoting from two places in the book of Hosea. See Hosea 2:23 (Rom.9:25) and Hosea 1:9-10 (Rom. 9:26). The prophet Hosea is referring to Israel, the ten northern tribes who had turned away from the Lord and who had embraced idolatry. Because of their unfaithfulness God disowns them and calls them "LOAMMI" (Hosea 1:9), a Hebrew expression which means "not My people." "For ye are not my people and I will not be your God" (Hosea 1:9). And yet we are amazed to learn that in the future Israel will once again be restored to God's favor and God will claim them as His own: "it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10 and see 2:23). These Jews turned away from God and went into an apostate, heathenish state, but God promised that one day these Israelites would be restored to His favor. Even though Hosea was referring to the Israelites, the principle applies to the Gentiles. The principle is this: **God will mercifully bring a previously rejected people into a relationship with Himself.** Paul applies this principle to the Gentiles: they were not God's people, but now they are! What is stressed in the Hosea quotes is the sovereign and pitying grace of God shown to those who (whether Jews or Gentiles) lack the right to consider themselves God's people (see 1 Peter 2:9-10).

### **Romans 9:27-29 (these verses focus upon the Jews mentioned in 9:24)**

"All right, we will let the Gentiles be part of God's people, but what about the Jews? Are not the Jews God's people? Why can't all the Jews be God's people? Why are the vast majority of Jews opposed to the gospel and enemies of the cross (11:28)? Why have so few Jews recognized Christ as Saviour and received Him by faith?"

Paul addresses these questions in Romans 9:27-29. His main point: **Only a small remnant of Jews will be saved.** Most will be lost and will perish. Paul quotes from the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures which clearly taught that this would be so. He quotes from Isaiah 10:22-23 and Isaiah 1:9.

"**Crieth**"=call out, cry out (indicates the urgent speech of the prophet). "**As the sand of the sea**"=an innumerable number (so many you can't count them all). "**Remnant**"=small part, small surviving group. Out of the millions and millions of Jews only a small number (a remnant) will be saved. The rest will perish. Compare Romans 9:6--out of the nation Israel (the Jews) there is a much smaller group known as true Israel or elect Israel or the godly remnant (see Rom. 11:5--"a remnant according to the election of grace").

Romans 9:28 speaks of God's judgment. God is going to trim and cut down the nation so that only a remnant is left. When God gets through judging there is little left over! ("**Finish**"=bring to an end, complete; "**Cut short**"=shorten, cut short, limit). Most of the Jews are "cut off" but a remnant will be saved. Compare "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer.30:7) when two thirds of the nation will be cut off and die (Zech.13:8).

Romans 9:29 seems to answer an objection: "It's not fair that only a few (small remnant) shall be saved. Why can't a majority of Jews be saved? Why are there only a few survivors?" But as we read the verse we should be thankful that there are ANY SURVIVORS! Thank God that any are saved! There were no survivors in Sodom! Not one citizen of Sodom escaped (Lot was not a Sodomite though he dwelt there). It was a TOTAL DESTRUCTION. They were destroyed UTTERLY. "**Lord of Sabaoth**"=a Hebrew expression meaning, "Lord of hosts" (Lord of armies, Lord of the universe, the Sovereign One, the Commander and Chief). "**Seed**"-this word should be connected to the word "remnant" in verse 27 (the imagery is perhaps the small portion of the harvest that is reserved for sowing; that is, most of the corn is destroyed by animals who use it for feed and by men who use it for food, but some seed is left over to plant the next crop).

### **Romans 9:30-31**

"**Followed**"=to run after, to pursue, to chase after something trying to get it. The Gentiles were not chasing after God's righteousness but they ended up getting it by simply putting their trust in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22-24; 4:5;

5:1). The Jews chased after the law of righteousness and tried diligently to keep the law, but they never obtained God's righteousness because God's righteousness does not come by way of the works of the law (Rom.3:20; 10:3-4; Gal. 2:16). To attain and to obtain righteousness by the law a person would have to keep the law perfectly every moment of his life. No sinful Jew (or Gentile) has ever done this or could ever do this (Gal. 3:10-11). The Gentiles were not chasing after God's righteousness but they heard the gospel, trusted Christ and were freely and fully justified (at the time Romans was written multitudes of Gentiles had embraced Christianity). The Jews were chasing after God's righteousness but were trying to get it the wrong way, depending on SELF rather than on the SAVIOUR (Rom. 10:3). They did not attain or reach the righteousness which they looked for and so desperately needed. The Jews looked but did not find. The Gentiles did not look but they found! (Like a man looking for gold all his life and not finding it; another man not looking for gold at all digs a foundation for his house and finds a large vein of gold. Another example: a hunter chases a rabbit all day and never gets it. Another man, who was not hunting at all, walks along at the right moment and in the right place and a rabbit happens to jump right into his arms!)

Another illustration: Think of people on the dock at New York Harbor trying to jump all the way to London (broad jump). An absolute impossibility (just as it is absolutely impossible for sinful men to keep God's holy law). None of the jumpers make it though some jump farther than others. But all come far short of the distant London shore. Another person is not trying to jump at all. He is just standing there watching all the foolish jumpers. He happens to step onto a ship that is docked to see better and suddenly the ship leaves the harbor and takes him all the way to London. The jumpers were trying to do it on their own and they did not attain and did not reach their goal. The bystander made it to London (though he wasn't trying to get there) by virtue of the boat which did all the work. Compare 1 Peter 3:18.

### **Romans 9:32-33**

Why didn't Israel get God's righteousness? Because they tried to get it the wrong way. And they rejected the very Christ whose death on the cross made it possible for them to be justified. Again Paul quotes from the Old Testament (see Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16). Think again of the ship illustration. The Jewish people are trying (in their own strength) to jump to London and none of them are attaining. Up pulls a ship (representing Christ who can bring them to where they need to be--1 Pet. 3:18). They resent this and are offended ("Get this ship out of our way. We are trying to jump!"). All they needed to do was to get onto the ship and let it do all the work carrying them to London (the ship represents **Christ**; getting on the ship represents **faith**; jumping represents trying to get to God by the works of the law, or by man's own religious efforts).

Compare Matthew 21:42-44. **What is your relationship to the Stone, Christ Jesus?** Three choices: 1) You can trip over the stone and be broken (1 Pet. 2:8); 2) You can have the stone fall on you and be pulverized. 3) You can stand firmly on the stone and be safe and secure (a picture of faith). Let's apply these same three choices to the ship illustration: 1) trip over the ship and get hurt; 2) jump in water and have ship run over you; 3) get onto the ship and let it take you to London.

Romans 9 has emphasized God's sovereignty. We are now ready to examine Romans 10 which emphasizes man's responsibility, and in particular, the responsibility of the Jewish people to believe on the Messiah and to find the righteousness that only He provides.

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