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Romans 9: God's Righteousness Revealed in His Choice of the Gentiles over Israel

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Romans 9

God's Righteousness Revealed in His Choice between Israel and the Gentiles

What about unsaved Israel?

For 2,000 years, since the selection of Abraham, God had dealt almost exclusively with Israel on earth and gave all of His revelations to mankind only to and through them. Why, suddenly, are they not part of God's plan for mankind? The simple answer is: they could have been, should have been, but chose not to be, so God chose to give to the Gentiles the opportunity to reach the rest of the world until the end of times when God will again give Israel, as a nation, additional special revelations and signs. The context of Romans 9-11 is God's choosing the Gentiles and temporarily setting aside His priority on the nation of Israel until the end of the age.

The context is global, not individual. If one takes the individual approach, then by rejecting Israel (or an unsaved individual), then He must likewise give the unsaved a second chance. In this context the rejected Israel is not ultimately rejected (11:1) and will eventually be "grafted" back into God's favor (11:24). If this perspective is lost, then deductive conclusions are erroneous.

The major issue for Paul is: After God's amazing revelation of an all encompassing, totally biblical integrated salvation as Paul reveals in Romans 1-8, how could Israel not have responded as a nation? What is God doing GLOBALLY?

After 2,000 years of dealing exclusively with Israel (Abraham to the Apostles), who were suppose to have reached out to the Gentiles, but did not do so, now God chooses to deal openly with Gentiles to bring in a harvest of the lost into His family. This is God's choice, and it is His right to chose to do so. We are about to reach the 2,000 years of God's dealings with the Gentiles!

9:1-5 Paul's Attitude towards Israel

9:1 I am telling the truth in Christ (I am not lying!), for my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit—

^{9:2} I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

^{9:3} For I could wish that I myself were accursed— cut off from Christ— for the sake of my people, my fellow countrymen,

^{9:4} who are Israelites. To them belong the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.

^{9:5} To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever! Amen.

A. Examine the first three verses and answer these questions

Note: (v.1)"in" the Holy Spirit - means "in the presence of" (not in a mystical state).

1. How would you describe Paul's concern or burden for Israel? Why did Paul say he was not lying?

2. Should we be as concerned for our countrymen, or the lost in general? Note: Paul's emotions are part of the message. He feels what God feels! See 1 Thess 1:5

Paul's wish is in the imperfect tense as an "idiomatic imperfect": "I was on the point of wishing..."

B. Paul writes of 7 spiritual privileges of Israel (9:4-5). Observe them by naming them below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Paul was amazed at this unbelief earlier in Rom 3:1-2. Paul is asking: With such privileges how could Israel, as a nation, have rejected their Messiah, "who is God overall"?

9:6-13 God Makes a Choice for the World

9:6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel,

^{9:7} nor are all the children Abraham's true descendants; rather "through Isaac will your descendants be counted."

^{9:8} This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God; rather, the children of promise are counted as descendants.

^{9:9} For this is what the promise declared: "About a year from now I will return and Sarah will have a son."

^{9:10} Not only that, but when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our ancestor Isaac—

^{9:11} even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling)—

^{9:12} it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger,"

^{9:13} just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

A. What does Paul mean by "word of God had failed?" (9:6)

- Paul now gives three OT illustrations of God making sovereign choices for Israel in the OT. Just as He has the right to favor them without any choice on their part, so He has the right to chose a replacement of their favored position if He should so desire. There is no hint that this technique applies to individuals.

1. Who are the “truly Israel?” (9:6-9) Who is the true son of Abraham for God’s purposes?

Note: at the beginning of the chapter Paul writes of the unsaved Israel. Who is the “true Israel” in Gal 3:29?

Who are the “true descendants” (9:7)? If the true descendants were through Isaac, who were the “false” (?) descendants or “other” descendants through Abraham?

What does the contrast between the “children of flesh” and the “children of promise” mean for us today? (9:8)

Note: The distinction between physical Israel and “spiritual” Israel existed since Abraham (children who believed in the promises of God, not just their genealogy), but the spiritual Israel of today is only a belief in Christ as the promised Savior/Messiah. Write the promise or belief in these verses:

- **Gal 3:26**

- **Rom 11:20**

- **Rom 11:23**

- Note the emphasis on the son of promise from the following genealogy study of Abraham:
 - Age of Abraham when he had the promise of a son in Gen. 12? (see 12:4)

 - Waiting period in Canaan until he took matters in his own hands? (16:3)

 - Age of Abraham when Ishmael was born? (16:16) _____
 - Age of Abraham when God reassured him of a promised son? (17:1)

 - Age of Abraham when Isaac was born? (17:17; 21:5) _____
 - How old was Sarah? (17:17) _____
 - How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born? _____
 - If Ishmael mocked Isaac when he was being weaned (about 2-3 years old), how old was he when Abraham sent him and Hagar away? (21:9-10)

- The great passage of this context is Gen 18:14. What lessons can be applied from this text?
- Why did God make Abraham wait so long?
- Who are the children of the bondwoman (Hagar) in Gal 4:31?

Note: these are analogies to teach a specific truth, not to be applied in every situation.

2. Who is the true chosen son of Isaac? (9: 10-13) Jacob over Esau, for God's purpose on earth.

Note: What was the age of Isaac when he married Rebeka? (25:20) _____

What was Isaac's age when the twin sons were born? (25:26) _____

How old was Isaac when he died? (35:28) _____

- God's choice was to choose the nation of Israel for a global purpose (9:10-11)¹ Why was Jacob chosen over Esau, even though Esau was the first to be born (Gen 25:25)?
- Notice: The context is how and why God chose the nation of Israel over others to be the promised recipient of God's promised salvation, thus blessing the nations of the world. These two men (Jacob and Esau) are discussed as nations, not as individuals:
What is Esau called in Gen 36:19? _____
What is Jacob's name in Gen 32:28? _____
- The prophecy, the "older will serve the younger" (9:12), was never fulfilled in the life of Esau, to show that God is not discussing them as individuals, but rather as nations. In fact, Esau was always the dominant of the two during their lifetime. Rather the Edomites (descendants of Esau, Gen 36:9) were made slaves to Israel under the reign of David (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Chron 18:13), nearly 900 years later! If the prophecy is fulfilled by the nations these two men represent, the application is national, not individual. The context shows why

¹ Calvinism makes much of these verses to prove that the individual has nothing to do with his salvation, man's free will is not involved in God's "choice"; that "free will" is merely an illusion and in the end, God causes people to do the things they do; that saving faith is what God produces completely apart from the person's free will; and that God holds people responsible for things they have no control over. One author has said, "It's a fatalistic puppet theology which Calvinists read into this chapter." It must be noted that this context is not dealing with salvation, rather is explaining how God chose the nation of Israel over Esau or the Moabites.

the nation of Israel was initially chosen by God, then it was set aside in God's plan in spite of having been the chosen nation for the Messiah, the Savior of the world. None of this had anything to do with the salvation of individuals within any of these groupings.

- What does the phrase "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (v. 13) mean? This phrase comes from Malachi 1:2-3 where God proves that He loves His chosen Israel. He had punished Esau's descendants Edom (vv. 3-4) because of their wickedness and in refusing Israel passage from the desert to the king's highway, the highlands on the east side of the Dead Sea, forcing Israel to march all the way south to the Gulf of Aquaba to cross the pass to the highland, then back north on the eastern highland on the king's highway (Num 20:14-21) en route to the eastern side of the Dead Sea. At one point, David and Joab killed all the men of Edom, except Hadad who escaped to Egypt (1 Kings 11:14-21). **Note: often national armies are God's instruments of His justice on earth.**
- **Esau became a bitter person** as a result of not accepting God's choice because he did not receive *the* blessing of his father Isaac, rather just *a* blessing.
NET **Hebrews 12:16** And see to it that no one becomes an immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that later when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no opportunity for repentance, although he sought the blessing with tears. Our lifestyle is the consequence of a series of decisions that we have made along the way. Some are cumulative, and some are immediately decisive.
- **This does not mean that any descendent of Esau could not be saved.** The context is not dealing with salvation, nor should it be made to do so. What does it mean to "hate father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life"? (see Luke 14:26)

Pharaoh (9:14-18) A national leader who impeded the progress of Israel – again dealing with national selection of Israel.

NET **Rom 9:14** What shall we say then? Is there **injustice** with God? Absolutely not!

^{9:15} For he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

^{9:16} So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.

^{9:17} For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

^{9:18} So then, God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden.

9:14 “Is there injustice with God?” It was not a question of justice that provoked the choice. It was merely God’s choosing, and He certainly has the right to choose who will be the father of the nation that will bring the human side of the Messiah to the earth. Notice: the decision with Isaac, Jacob (pre-birth choice), and Pharaoh had nothing to do with their salvation. What would make God’s choices unjust?

9:15 Paul quotes Ex 33:19 to prove God’s sovereign right to show mercy on whomever He decides. This decision is not arbitrary, but pre-decided. In the context, what is the “mercy” that is being discussed and demonstrated?

9:16 Did the choice of who would be the Patriarch of the Jewish nation have anything to do with the “human desire or exertion” of Isaac or Jacob? _____ Remember the argument in the context: After all the antecedents of God making special choices in favor of Israel, yet she did not respond favorably. It should be no surprise that God would chose the Gentiles to show His mercy. When God makes choices in your life do you accept that He is not arbitrary, purposeless, or unfair to you? Is it always easy?

How did Job’s wife want him to respond to the choices God made for his life? (Job 2:9)

9:17 “For *this* purpose” must refer back to the same purpose in the context: God’s liberty to choose Israel or put her aside (for a period of time). God chooses whom He will use and how He will work His purpose out in life. What is God’s purpose in bringing Israel out of Egypt?

How did Pharaoh give God the opportunity to demonstrate His power and choice?

The prepositional phrase, “*in you*,” could mean “near, in the presence of, before” you (Ex 3:20). In other words, God wanted an excuse to demonstrate His power before the world, so that it would not be seen as coincidence or accidents, but phenomenal power declared beforehand that accomplished exactly what God said He would do. It took the stubborn pride of Pharaoh, which God augmented,² to “obligate” God’s miraculous intervention to rescue Israel from Egypt. Notice again: the context is not dealing with our salvation, but the choosing of Israel to fulfill God’s plan.

² Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 31; 9:7, 34-35) while God was making sure he resisted Moses’ request by hardening Pharaoh’s heart (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:27; 14:4, 8 and also 14:7). Each happened seven times. For every time Pharaoh hardened his own heart, God hardened it more.

God raises up leaders (both good and bad) and providentially orchestrates situations to demonstrate His power in circumstances beyond the realm of coincidences. In this way He shows Himself to be a mighty God who is ever present. This is His plan and purpose: to make Himself evident to a blind world. Was it easy for Moses to accept the responsibility for leading Israel and to resist the stubbornness of Pharaoh?

Ex 3:11

Ex 4:10-11

Ex 4:21

God's purpose since the creation has been the same: "that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." (See how it was fulfilled in Ex 15:14; Josh 2:10; 9:9; 1 Sam 4:7-9). Could it be that any attempt to fulfill this purpose will be blessed of God?

This global purpose is to offer the world the opportunity to know the only, true and living God. There is no hint of exclusivity or exclusion of people from being able to know God, as they hear of Him. What is the key to the salvation of the Gentiles in Rom 10:14?

9:18 The illustration of Pharaoh's resistance was an affront to Israel who, in Paul's time, was playing the role of Pharaoh in resisting the purpose of God. The more Pharaoh resisted, the more God granted him the desire of his heart by hardening his heart even more, thus making any judicial act of judgment against Pharaoh fully justified. Once again the mercy and hardening are not arbitrary but rather in complete cooperation with the spirit and will of the people. The argument of the context is: if Israel is going to resist their Messiah, then God will harden the nation, and choose to give the opportunity to the Gentiles to receive His blessings. Individuals in both groups will always be able to be saved, but as a people the choice is made to bless the Gentiles as He did Israel in the OT. What do the warnings from God mean when they say, "Harden not your hearts..."? (Heb 3:8, 15)

9:19-21 Explanation of God's choice

^{NET} **Rom 9:19** You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has ever resisted his will?"

^{9:20} But who indeed are you— a mere human being— to talk back to God? Does what is molded say to the molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

^{9:21} Has the potter no right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use?

9:19 Paul is precluding the question, "Why does He still find fault?" The context must be kept in mind: why has God chosen to give His blessings and promises to the Gentiles instead of only to Israel. This is not an individual salvation issue, but remains a national issue. How can God still fault Israel if He chose to set her

aside (for a while)? No where does the Scripture say that God forced Israel to reject her Messiah. Israel's rejection coincided with God's intended plan for the Gentiles. However, individuals within Israel are free to go against the nation's rejection of her Messiah and be saved.

Can Israel reverse God's plan to offer His promises to the Gentiles? The Judaizers of the first century attempted to do just this, but it was in vain. When one applies this text to another subject he is deducing that the principle or action here applies in every circumstance, but the text does not say that. It must be deduced.

9:20 If God makes a choice, human beings cannot change it, or even question it... and why should we? He never makes a mistake or acts unjustly. One's perspective of the character of God is vital for the understanding of how God chooses to deal with men, nations and mankind. Abraham used the argument of the character of God in order to save a remnant from Sodom and Gomorra. See Gen 18:25. What is the phrase that gives us confidence and trust in His decisions?

Notice: Whatever way one interprets God's actions in dealing with people, in the same way He expects us to act in our relationships with others. What does Jer 9:23-24 use as our guide?

9:21 The Potter has the right to make the vessel any way He chooses. Is the reference to "O man" to give the passage an individual (instead of a national) interpretation, or is he speaking rhetorically? Notice how this metaphor is used in the OT. The declaration is addressed to the nation as though it were a person. In Isa 64:8 who is the "clay" and who is the "potter"?

^{NET} **Jer 18:4** Now and then there would be something wrong with the pot he was molding from the clay with his hands. So he would rework the clay into another kind of pot as he saw fit. ⁵ Then the LORD said to me, ⁶ "I, the LORD, say: '**O nation of Israel**, can I not deal with you as this potter deals with the clay? In my hands, you, **O nation of Israel**, are just like the clay in this potter's hand.'

The OT reference that Paul is making, especially to his Jewish readers, they know well that he is referring to the molding and making of the nation of Israel. God raises up nations and He brings them down, according to His purpose and plan.

9:22-26 The rejection of Israel and the acceptance of Gentiles and Jews who respond by faith.

^{NET} **Rom 9:22** But what if God, willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath prepared for destruction?

^{9:23} And what if he is willing to make known the wealth of his glory on the objects of mercy that he has prepared beforehand for glory—

^{9:24} even us, whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

^{9:25} As he also says in Hosea: "I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,' and I will call her who was unloved, 'My beloved.'"

^{9:26} "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

9:22 In the hypothetical situation planted by Paul, the same objective of his national choice is carried through. What was that purpose? (9:17)

God's objective is to make Himself known to all mankind. His power and wrath are part of His revelation. What does the phrase "has endured with much patience" refer to? Is it the individual sins of a single sinner, or the hundreds of years of rebelling against God's prophets and messengers, especially by the entire nation of Israel?

What are the "objects" or "vessels"? Are they individuals or nations? Compare Rev 2:25 and 2:26. What does the "they" in v. 26 refer to (see vs. 25)?

"Vessels of faith" is a genitive of destination, therefore means, "vessels destined for wrath." The phrase "fitted for destruction" is the same Greek form as either the passive (as the text reads) or the middle (or reflexive) which would read, "objects destined for wrath that **have fit themselves** for destruction." Though the more correct reading is likely the passive as the text reads. The word "destruction," *apoleia*, can refer to hell or punishment. If this is a national application, then are there any nations, "vessels," that Paul was referring to that have been destroyed because of their rejection of God's revelations? How are nations patiently endured though they are destined for wrath?

9:23 In contrast God has chosen "vessels of mercy," Gentiles, to demonstrate the "riches of His glory." Who could imagine a Jewish God, YWAH, who could love and show mercy to the despised Gentiles? Notice the arguments for this display of mercy in these verses:

John 10:16

Rom 3:29

Acts 28:27-28

In the context, later Paul addresses the Gentiles as the objects or vessels who have received this blessing, to not presume on their favored position, because just as He chose to give the Gentiles the opportunity of mercy, He could take it away and grant it again to the Jewish nation (Rom 11:17-24). The key to understanding the entire passage is Romans 11:25:

^{NET} **Rom 11:25** For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: A **partial hardening** has happened to **Israel** until the full number of the **Gentiles** has come.

9:24 Just because the mercy of God is freely given to the Gentiles, it does not mean that (1) Jews cannot be saved, nor (2) that all Gentiles will be saved. Individuals in the rejected Israel or the favored Gentiles must respond in the same manner, by faith to His call of mercy and promises. This group appears as a new nation, a new body of people, who are followers of the Messiah.

9:25-26 This new group come from those who are “not my people” or Gentile nation as well as from Israel who were called metaphorically “Not my people” by the naming of the son of Hosea *Lo Ammi* (2:23). That is, both the Gentiles and the unbelieving Israel were “not my people.” However, out of both of the national groupings, some will respond by faith and become “sons of the living God.” What is the condition in John 1:12 to become a “son of God”?

9:27-29 Continuing in the context of national dealings especially with Israel,

^{NET} **Romans 9:27** And Isaiah cries out on behalf of Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved, ^{9:28} for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth completely and quickly." ^{9:29} Just as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of armies had not left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have resembled Gomorrah."

9:27 Paul describes the “destruction” (v. 22) that was about to occur to the nation of Israel, a “remnant” will be saved. Either this remnant refers to (1) the physical survivors of the destruction of the nation of Israel, or (2) the few Jews who believed and became part of the Church. In the context it appears to refer to the first view.

9:28 Notice that God’s destructive judgment is “on earth” (not in hell) and it will be “thoroughly and quickly” fulfilled (in the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem).

9:29 The reference in v. 29, “left to **US** a posterity...” refers to the Jewish people who would survive a coming judgment on Jerusalem. The eternal lessons of this passage are that God will show no favorites; and what He says in His Word He will do. If He will destroy His favored nation Israel for their disobedience and rejection of their Savior, then He could do the same to any other favored Gentile nation today.

9:30-31 How do we apply these global principles to individuals

^{NET} **Rom 9:30** What shall we say then?— that the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith, ^{9:31} but Israel even though pursuing a law of righteousness did not attain it.

9:30 Individual who appropriate His mercy, regardless of which national grouping they may belong to? If the key to acceptance before God is an acceptable and sufficient righteousness that God accepts, then an amazing contradiction has occurred: Gentile nations who do not pursue righteousness, “attained or obtained” righteousness. The word *katalambano*, “to lay hold of so as to make one’s own, appropriate, or take possession,” refers to acquiring something that is not your own, but becomes your own possession, in this case, by an act of “faith.”

9:31 By contrast, Israel as a nation, attempted to follow the law of righteousness (like the Ten Commandments), but they could not “attain or reach” the law of righteousness (like the Ten Commandments)... nor can anyone else. What is the purpose of the law in Gal 3:24?

9:32-33 The “stumbling stone”

^{NET} **Romans 9:32** Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,
9:33 just as it is written, "Look, I am laying in Zion a stone that will cause people to stumble and a rock that will make them fall, yet the one who believes in him will not be put to shame."

9:32 The “stumbling stone” that brought Israel down was the unwillingness to admit their impossibility of being righteous enough for acceptance by God. The “rock of offense” was that they could not be good enough for God to accept them. They were convinced they would be good enough by being legalistic and/or believing that their good would outweigh their bad. For anyone to say that their diligent efforts were in vain or useless, was a terrible offense.

9:33 The promise to the believer who freely confesses his sinfulness (1 Jn 1:9) is that God fully forgives him and promises that he “will not be ashamed” (*kataischuno*, “put to shame, or dishonor, or rejection”). Regardless of which national group anyone pertains to, the grace of God extends to everyone in the world, if they only get to hear and have a chance to respond by faith.