

The humanity of Yeshua is affirmed to be Jewish *kata sarka* (κατὰ σάρκα) in v. 5, yet along with this Yeshua is praised as *epi pantōn Theos* (ἐπὶ πάντων θεός) or “God over all” in v. 5 as well. The significance of Yeshua being incarnated as a human being, from the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and later David—a Jewish line—is something that should serve as significantly distinctive of Paul’s fellow Jewish brethren, hopefully enabling the non-Jewish Believers in Rome to exhibit a bit more respect and honor to their fellow Jewish Believers, from whom the Savior arose. The significance of Yeshua being “God over all,” while important for everyone as the Creator taking a decisive interest in the affairs of humankind, is especially piqued, as noted by N.T. Wright, with the God of Israel being personally interested in the promises He issued to His chosen people:

“If we read v. 5 in this way, what force does it add to the opening paragraph as a whole? Just this: that the Messiah who is from Israel’s own race, their highest privilege and final hope, is the very embodiment of their sovereign Lord, their covenant God.”²³

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED” [Genesis 21:12]. 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. 9 For this is the word of promise: “AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON” [Genesis 18:10, 14].

9:6-29 Romans 9:6-29 has been traditionally read by many Protestant examiners, from an overwhelmingly Calvinistic grid of God choosing or electing some *individuals* for salvation, and other *individuals* for damnation. Were such questions and issues of this kind of election, those originally posed by the Apostle Paul, in trying to sort through the issue of a widescale, First Century Jewish rejection of Yeshua? For the most part, Second Temple Jews saw their election as God’s chosen more in terms of their ethnicity guaranteeing them a place in God’s Kingdom and the world to come (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1), than anything else. A survey of 9:6-29 demonstrates that this is completely contrary to the thrust of the Tanach, because it has been more common to only see a remnant of those from Israel actually “saved” (vs. 27-28), and now this can only occur through the work of Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah (10:9, 12). Approaching 9:6-29 more from the vantage point of Paul criticizing Jewish ethnic particularism, and how only a remnant within Israel proper has been seen to be saved throughout history, might be difficult for those who are more keen to impress upon the text questions of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Reformers. Craig S. Keener interjects the useful thought,

“Jewish people rightly affirmed God’s sovereignty alongside his election of Israel [i.e., m.*Avot* 3:15]. Yet Paul argues that, with respect to individual *salvation*, God being sovereign precludes him from being bound to choose on the basis of ethnicity. He can save Gentiles as well as Jews, and on the terms he chooses.”²⁴

The corporate election of Israel as God’s people remains true, as is seen in Paul’s emphasis on the selection of the progenitors of Israel. Yet, the inclusion of individuals among His Kingdom people is not dependent on the human volition of thinking that ethnicity guarantees one redemption, as those from the nations are included in His plan (vs. 24-26) along with Jews. If anything, it needs to be noted that God has shown mercy to the chosen, corporate community of Israel throughout history, even in instances when mercy from Him was not deserved. As has been demonstrated throughout the record of the Tanach, God has been overly merciful and graceful, regarding the corporate calling and election of

²³ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:631.

²⁴ Keener, 120.

Israel proper—when various situations could have merited harsher actions, and would have merited harsher actions from an entirely human frame of reference, or that seen in ancient pagan religions with vengeful gods or goddesses which would wipe out entire civilizations on a whim.

Much of the dilemma 9:6-29, and throughout chs. 9-11, is the fairness of God given the widescale First Century Jewish rejection of Yeshua, what it means for the nations' reception of Him, and what it means for what must eventually happen in the future with the culmination of the Messianic Age. Witherington carefully observes,

“Vindication is at issue here, God vindicating his own Word, as well as delivering or saving his own people. Their rejection of Jesus has prompted something of a crisis of hope, if not a crisis of faith in someone like Paul, and so he must wrestle through it to an answer about God, about God’s salvation plan, and about the future of his own kin according to the flesh, his fellow Jews. But on top of all that, he has to deal with Gentiles in Rome who apparently believe that God is indeed a supersessionist, having by and large replaced his first chosen people with another one. Paul will and must deny what appears to be the case, and he must undercut Gentile hubris and make clear the Gentile Christians’ indebtedness to the ‘root’ and their status as grafted-in ‘wild olive branches.’”²⁵

While Romans 9:6-29 has been customarily approached from a Calvinistic framework of individuals either predestined for salvation or damnation, 9:6-29 needs to instead be approached more in view of the corporate election of Israel.²⁶ **God’s purposes for Israel proper remain true and certain**, although in much human estimation would probably be considered undeserved *although God considers it deserved*. For the First Century Jewish person, in recognizing some of the significant rebellion that his or her people had demonstrated toward the Lord in past history—when a corporate elimination of Israel would have occurred via any other Ancient Near Eastern deity—there should really have been no complaining with the recognitions that: (a) only a remnant of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is probably only going to be a part of the world to come, and (b) the nations in widespread rebellion against God as Creator, being included in such a world to come, should be recognized as how gracious God truly is. The corporate election of Israel, and God’s use of this community in history, is to be seen as the major issue here, not only in conjunction with other statements made by Paul (11:1, 28), but by decompressing the Tanach quotations that he provides. As is asserted in the *Wesley Study Bible*,

“Paul is not [really] saying that God ‘predestines’ some individuals for eternal salvation and some for eternal damnation. In fact, Paul is not [really] focusing [that much] on the salvation of generic individuals at all, but rather on whether God can be trusted to be faithful to Israel as a whole people.”²⁷

Grant Osborne indicates, “Paul was controversial because he seemed to favor the Gentiles over the Jews, and so the Roman Christians might think he would increase the tensions between the two communities in the [assembly] there. So Paul wrote to convince them that his ministry was pro-Jewish as well as pro-Gentile, and that it stemmed from the Scriptures themselves.”²⁸ Paul was very keen to later say, “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1). Directing his attention more to the non-Jewish Believers in Rome, he emphasizes, “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God’s* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (11:28). **God’s corporate election of Israel remains true and irrevocable**. When it defies human logic for God to continue steadfast with a people that has too frequently dismissed Him, His ways, and His

²⁵ Witherington, 245.

²⁶ Moo, 571; Kruse, pp 391-392, while disagreeing, do at least recognize how the issues in Romans ch. 9 can be viewed, or are being viewed more and more, by various examiners, from the perspective of corporate election.

²⁷ Joel B. Green, ed., *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 1379.

²⁸ Osborne, 234.

purpose, God has remained faithful to and consistent with His agreements with the Patriarchs—something uniquely demonstrated to Ancient Israel in the Tanach and the First Century Jewish community, and not to any other people. As Wright concludes,

“Paul is not...producing an abstract essay on the way in which God always works with individuals, or for that matter with nations and races. This is specifically the story of Israel, the chosen people; it is the unique story of how the creator has worked with the covenant people, to bring about the purpose for which the covenant was made in the first place. It is the story, in other words, whose climax and goal is the Messiah.”²⁹

First Century Jewish questions are being asked and probed in Romans 9:9-26, not questions of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Reformers. What Paul observes throughout this section of his letter, is that while the corporate election of Israel proper in history, as God’s chosen, His vessel of His truth, and His means of displaying His goodness to the world stays true—there has widely only existed a remnant of redeemed individual people within this Israel. And, if God has been gracious enough to see that a remnant of redeemed individuals are included within this community, then one can permit God to allow those from the nations who believe in Israel’s Messiah to be a part of His community as well.

9:6 Paul makes a critical assertion, which has confused a number of Christian, and even Messianic Bible readers: “But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel” (NASU). What is this to mean? Some have taken Romans 9:6, “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (NIV), as meaning that Paul has non-Jewish Believers, who have placed their trust in Israel’s Messiah, as being regarded as a part of Israel too. While there are other Pauline passages worthy of note in Romans chs. 9-11, where non-Jewish Believers being joined to Israel are in view (9:24-26; 11:16-25), this is not what is being described in Romans 9:6, when the surrounding context is adequately considered. What is actually being considered, is that if Jewish people reject Yeshua, they will be cut off from Israel’s Kingdom. Just because God’s corporate election of Israel remains true and unchangeable, this does not mean that individuals descended from the Patriarchs will be “Israel” in the end.

The clause which can confuse many is *ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl* (οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ), “for~not all the ones of Israel - [are] Israel” (Brown and Comfort).³⁰ Messianic versions like the TLV render Romans 9:6b as, “For not all those who are descended from Israel are Israel,” with The Messianic Writings having, “not all who are from Israel are Israel.” The NRSV actually has a fair extrapolation: “For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel.” The point being made by Paul here—**which was quite painful for him to admit**—was that even though physically Israelites, many of his own Jewish people would not belong to Israel in the end. Such an “Israel” should be regarded as the restored, Messianic Kingdom, ruled by Yeshua the Messiah. As Osborne puts it, “His message is that God had never guaranteed automatic acceptance into his family on the basis of national identity. This was a serious misunderstanding on the part of Jewish particularism, that is, the belief that they alone were God’s elect people and were born into his family. It is not Israel but God who is sovereign over salvation.”³¹

While the issue of various Jewish people—who are without question physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—not truly being considered of “Israel” in the end, is most unsettling and uncomfortable, a Messianic Jewish commentator like David H. Stern has to recognize, in his *Jewish New*

²⁹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:634.

³⁰ Brown and Comfort, 555.

³¹ Osborne, 241.

Testament Commentary, the reality that the Tanach does detail various instances of where God's chosen people can be cut off from Him:

"Here, where his focus is on the Jewish nation as a whole, in its capacity as God's people, **Israel**...he introduces the concept of the faithful 'remnant,' an idea which pervades the *Tanakh* (see vv. 27-28&N, 11:1-6&NN). In fact, the *Tanakh* warns that in certain cases of disobedience a person may be 'cut off from among his people' (see Ac 13:38-39N). That the notion was accepted in non-Messianic Judaism can be inferred from the fact that in the Mishna the well-known statement, 'All Israel has a place in the world to come,' (Sanhedrin 10:1, quoted more fully at 11:26aN) is immediately followed by a list of Israelites who have no place in the world to come."³²

Stern goes on to describe, "It should not be thought that God is quick to cast away his sons, meaning the Jewish people (Exodus 4:22)."³³ He makes light of a discussion to this effect in the Talmud:

"R. Judah says, 'If you conduct yourselves in the way good children do, then you are children, and if not, you are not children [of the Lord your God].' R. Meir says, 'One way or another, "You are children of the Lord your God." And so Scripture says, 'Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea...it shall be said to them, "You are the children of the living God"' (Hos. 2: 1) [B.'s version: "They are sottish children' (Jer. 4:22); 'They are children in whom is no faith' (Deu. 32:20), 'A seed of evil doers, sons that deal corruptly' (Isa. 1: 4), then Hos. 2: 1] [Sifré Deu. XCVI:IV.1]. Why all these further verses? If you should reply, then only when they are foolish are they classified as sons, but not when they lack faith, come and take note: "They are children in whom is no faith' (Deu. 32:20). If you should reply, then only when they have no faith they are classified as sons, but when they serve idols they are not classified as sons, then come and hear: 'A seed of evil doers, sons that deal corruptly' (Isa. 1: 4). And should you say, well, they're called sons that act corruptly, but not good sons, then come and hear: 'Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea...it shall be said to them, "You are the children of the living God"' (Hos. 2:1)" (b.Kiddushin 36a).³⁴

It is useful for us to keep these Talmudic sentiments in mind—lest especially, per contemporary debates over ecclesiology, any non-Jewish Believers in today's broad Messianic movement get heated, and at all choose to gloat or be prideful of the fact that various Jewish people might not be considered "Israel" in the final scheme of things (cf. 11:19-21). This is something that the Sages surely wrestled with, as here they offered a wide selection of Tanach Scripture passages, to prove—however desperate it may seem—to offer a status of "Israel" to the most sinful of chosen people.

Hegg has also commented on Romans 9:6, in his 2007 commentary:

"The explanation...that Paul...gives us, is 'For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel (οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ [*ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl*]), literally, 'for not all those out of Israel they are Israel.' 'Out of' (ἐκ [*ek*]) is understood to mean 'descended from.' Thus, 'Israel' in the first instance refers to the individual (Jacob) while the second 'Israel' denotes the nation.

"We must be careful here to understand the point Paul is making lest we fall into the same trap of the Church fathers and take this verse to be an open door to the replacement theology which they spawned. Paul's point is quite simple and straightforward: physical descendency from the patriarchs does not guarantee citizenship in the chosen nation of Israel. In fact, Paul's point

³² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 389.

The key statements from the m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1, which classify the groups unqualified to enter the world to come, include, "He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and an Epicurean" (Neusner, *Mishnah*, 604).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

from the outset of this section is that God is dealing with the present nation in exactly the same way as He dealt with the patriarchs, that is, on the basis of His election. If Ishmael, for example, was not chosen to be the progenitor of the chosen nation, yet was from the loins of Abraham, this proves the elective decree of God. In like manner, Esau, though physically descended from Isaac, is not counted as the progenitor of the nation of Israel, a fact which has its basis in God's having chosen Jacob his brother for this position."³⁵

Even if one does not not totally agree with some of Hegg's reliance on a Calvinist soteriology, he is entirely right in the points that he makes about how physical descent from Jacob/Israel, does not automatically guarantee one membership in the restored, Messianic Kingdom of Israel, with the Messiah Yeshua as its Sovereign. The Apostle Paul was absolutely mortified over the fact that a great number of his own people would be eternally condemned (v. 3), and not considered "Israel" in the end.

Excursus: Varied and Nuanced Uses of Israel in Romans chs. 9-11

Far too frequently, not only among your average Christians—but also among many Messianic Jews—when they encounter usages of "Israel," in the Bible, it is automatically assumed that only the Jewish people are being referred to. Does this at all properly align with what we see in Biblical history? Is there not some variance of how the term "Israel" is used? Those who are more historically conscious in their Bible reading,³⁶ do recognize that it is inappropriate to simply equate all uses of "Israel" as being synonymous with "the Jewish people." This is especially true the further and further back you go in Biblical history.

In the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* or *ISBE*, which is often considered to be a general conservative resource, the entry "Israel, History of the People of" by C.F. Pfeieffer (2:908-924), includes references to ten different periods of time in Biblical history which "Israel," in some form or another, is featured as a player. These include:

1. Pre-Mosaic Israel
2. Moses and the Exodus
3. Conquest of Canaan
4. Period of the Judges
5. United Kingdom
6. Divided Kingdom
7. Babylonian Exile
8. Return from Exile and Restoration
9. The Jews under Alexander and His Successors
10. The Jews under the Romans³⁷

The main periods where there is confusion regarding how the term "Israel" appears in Biblical history, occur from the Divided Kingdom period to Second Temple Judaism. The Northern Kingdom that broke off from the Southern Kingdom was known as "Israel," and this is borne out in prophetic texts like Hosea and Amos, where the "Israel" being referred to is principally a Northern Kingdom audience.³⁸ This can be confusing for many Bible readers, who may not make enough of an effort to place such prophetic books within their original setting. Further confusion ensues

³⁵ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 277.

³⁶ Cf. *NIV Study Bible*, 1759; *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, 1850, and the notes on the historical diversity of uses of "Israel."

³⁷ The outline in C.F. Pfeieffer, "Israel, History of the People of," in *ISBE*, 2:908-909.

³⁸ Cf. R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 860, 869 (Hosea); pp 884-885, 887 (Amos); Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp 354-356 (Hosea); pp 375-376 (Amos).

later in a text like Ezekiel, where following the fall of the Northern Kingdom, when “Israel” is used it can be as a reference to the Southern Kingdom, as the legitimate successor state to the title and the whole of the rights of “Israel.” In the Apostolic Scriptures, “Israel” does largely represent the Jewish community, but that does not mean that non-Jews were excluded from being a part of Israel’s Kingdom realm, as their Messiah faith certainly gave them citizenship (Ephesians 2:11-13; 3:6; cf. Galatians 6:16), being grafted-in to the olive tree (Romans 11:16-18).

There is a significant amount of debate among Romans interpreters, as to how many different variances regarding “Israel” are present in the Apostle Paul’s discussion of Romans chs. 9-11. Generally speaking, at least two different views of “Israel” are believed to be present: the First Century Jewish community that had largely rejected the Messiah, and the restored eschatological Kingdom of Israel. Within Paul’s salvation-historical perspective of “Israel” in Romans chs. 9-11—which is intended to direct the reader to the point of “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25-26)—it may even be that there are as high as five different detectable variances in which “Israel” is used:

- the historical ancient community (Romans 9:4-5³⁹; 10:19-21⁴⁰; 11:7-10⁴¹)
- God’s corporate elect, and/or an eschatological, restored Kingdom of Israel composed of righteous people (Romans 9:6⁴²; 11:25-27⁴³)
- Paul’s First Century Jewish countrymen (Romans 9:4⁴⁴; 11:1⁴⁵, 11-15⁴⁶, 28⁴⁷)
- the Jewish people of largely the Second Temple era (Romans 9:31⁴⁸)
- the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Romans 11:2-4⁴⁹; cf. 1 Kings 19:10, 14)

³⁹ “[W]ho are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 9:4-5).

⁴⁰ “But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, ‘I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU’ [Deuteronomy 32:21]. And Isaiah is very bold and says, ‘I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME’ [Isaiah 65:1]. But as for Israel He says, ‘ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE’ [Isaiah 65:2]” (Romans 10:19-21).

⁴¹ “What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, ‘GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY’ [Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10]. And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER’ [Psalm 69:22-23; 35:8]” (Romans 11:7-10).

⁴² “But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel” (Romans 9:6).

⁴³ “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS’ [Isaiah 59:20-21; 27:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34]” (Romans 11:25-27).

⁴⁴ “[W]ho are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises” (Romans 9:4).

⁴⁵ “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1).

⁴⁶ “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:11-15).

⁴⁷ “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God’s* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28).

⁴⁸ “[B]ut Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law” (Romans 9:31).

⁴⁹ “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage* about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? Lord, ‘THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE’ [1 Kings 19:10]. But what is the divine response to him? ‘I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL’ [1 Kings 19:14]” (Romans 11:2-4).

One of the key points in this section, of Paul's letter to the Romans, is not to exclude the nations from being grafted-in to the community of Israel (Romans 11:17-21), but to instead speak more against widescale Greek and Roman arrogance, toward the Jewish people who have largely rejected the Messiah. Such people are to still certainly be regarded and treated as "Israel," as God alone is the final arbiter of any person, as He is the One who has broken off natural branches (Romans 11:17). The non-Jewish Believers in Rome were carefully instructed, "because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:31). If some Jewish branches have been broken off of Israel's olive tree, non-Jewish Believers who have received Israel's Messiah have the profound responsibility to be vessels of mercy and grace to such people—**and not be arrogant or disrespectful**—so that such Jewish people might be shown Messiah Yeshua.

It might be easier or more convenient for some people in today's Messianic Judaism to simply assume that when "Israel" is spoken of in the Bible, it is *just* the ancestors of today's Jewish people. A more careful survey of the Bible, across multiple centuries, reveals that more specificity is indeed involved. Ultimately, we are reminded that in the post-resurrection era, knowing Israel's Messiah Yeshua is required for one to ultimately be considered a part of the Kingdom (cf. Romans 9:6). There are sadly going to be some Jewish people, who because of their rejection of Yeshua, will be excluded from being considered as "Israel" in the end. Because of arrogance and disrespect of the Jewish people, there will probably also be many non-Jews who thought they were a part of the Commonwealth of Israel via their faith in Yeshua, but in the end are excluded precisely because they did not have a true heart change and were never moved to be vessels of mercy and grace toward Yeshua's own physical Jewish brethren.

9:7-9 Having just asserted that "not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God's people!" (v. 6, NLT), Paul proceeds to explain how it is insufficient to simply be considered a physical child or descendant of Abraham to be redeemed, as Abraham had many descendants or "seed" (*sperma*, σπέρμα). Paul states, "indeed, not all the descendants are seed of Avraham; rather, 'What is to be called your "seed" will be in Yitz'chak'" (v. 7, CJB). Included in this is an allusion to Genesis 21:12, issued when Hagar and Ishmael were sent away: "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.'" Even with Abraham having two principal sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and later other sons (Genesis 25:1-4), the line of promise was through Isaac, likened unto a sub-group within the greater whole. Paul uses this to explain, "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring" (v. 8, ESV). The children of the flesh (*ta tekna tēs sarkos*, τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς) or physical descendants, are contrasted with the children of the promise (*ta tekna tēs epangelias*, τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας).

The promise, as Paul asserts here (v. 9), is seen in God's decree of Genesis 18:10: "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." It is via the line of Isaac that Jacob, the Twelve Tribes of Israel and within these the tribe of Judah, and later the line of King David would arise—ultimately seeing Yeshua the Messiah arrive on the scene of history, which is indeed the ultimate promise (1:2-3). The true seed, children, or posterity are those who may be regarded as children of promise—meaning those people who appropriate the ultimate promise granted to Abraham, the Messiah and what He has accomplished via His sacrifice. This is the thrust of Paul's word in Galatians 3:29, "And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants [*tou Abraam sperma*, τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα], heirs according to promise." This is something available to all who look to Israel's Messiah, be they Jewish or those of the nations (cf. Galatians 3:27-28).

10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER" [Genesis 25:23]. 13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED" [Malachi 1:2-3].

9:10-12 Just as God had to choose the line of Abraham via Isaac to accomplish His tasks, it has to be observed that God's choosing of the continuing line through Jacob, was definitely a result of His grace and mercy. Paul observes how, "something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac" (v. 10, NRSV). Even with a widescale Jewish rejection of Yeshua being the main issue in view (vs. 1-5), Paul establishes how the promises of God were given to his ancestors, and that their election for God's purposes in the world remain true and surely in force. What is communicated in v. 11 establishes how God's calling of the line of Israel was entirely by His choice of purpose: "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call" (RSV).

As Bible readers should recall from the Genesis narratives, from an entirely human perspective, the choosing of the line of Jacob, as opposed to the older Esau, makes little sense. Even with Esau recognized as a fleshly man, with little regard for his entitled blessings as firstborn (Genesis 25:27-24; Hebrews 12:16), Jacob and his mother Rebekah still ultimately swindled the firstborn blessings from Jacob (Genesis 27), which normally would be perceived as an act of injustice. The older serving the younger (v. 12) was completely contrary and irregular to most of Ancient Near Eastern society, where inheritance would have been determined by who the chronologically born first would be. God's choosing of the line of Jacob was "not by works" (v. 11), *ouk ex ergōn* (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων), meaning that it had "nothing to do with achievements" (Phillips New Testament)—because if it truly did, than one who shortchanged his brother of his birthright, and who was a swindler and cheat, would surely not have been chosen by an impartial God. Jacob's line was, rather, the better of the two for Him to fulfill His long-term purposes. That we are encountering God's corporate election of Israel for His purposes, and not an individual selection of Jacob or redemption of Esau for damnation, is seen when Genesis 25:23, noted by Paul in v. 12, is fully quoted:

"The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.'"

It is to be noted that nowhere in the Tanach, did Esau ever "serve" Jacob, even if in the future the two brothers did reach a period of rapprochement (Genesis 32-33). It is to be observed, that during the reign of David, the Edomites or descendants of Esau, were subjected to Israelite rule (2 Samuel 8:14).

9:13 The fact that groups of people, and not the individuals Jacob and Esau, are really what is in view here, is seen by Paul's reference to Malachi 1:2-3, which references the people of Israel and the people of Edom, respectively:

"I have loved you,' says the LORD. But you say, 'How have You loved us?' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the LORD. 'Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and *appointed* his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.'"

In v. 13, it is best to take the references to "loved" and "hated," as akin to "preferred" and "rejected" or "loved less" (cf. Luke 14:26), in terms of the destinies of these two lines. God demonstrates Himself to be faithful through the corporate lines of Isaac and Jacob, and consistent in terms of the promises He granted them.

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 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" [Exodus 33:19]. 16 So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH" [Exodus 9:16]. 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

9:14-15 While recognizing that God's selection of the line of Jacob was entirely by His grace, what Paul will explain in vs. 14-15, truly helps to emphasize how God's corporate selection of Israel has been entirely by His mercy. Paul interjects the thought, "So what are we going to say? Isn't this unfair on God's part? Absolutely not!" (v. 14, Common English Bible). If anything, God's selection of the line of a second son in Isaac, and a second son in Jacob, should be perceived as, at least, inequitable.

What is really keen to note is how Paul appeals to God's true sense of justice (v. 15), in making light of Exodus 33:19, when He reveals Himself to Moses. What is quite significant about this word, is that it is issued in the context of the Lord recognizing that the Ancient Israelites were stubborn and obstinate (Exodus 33:5), right on the heels of the incident with the golden calf (Exodus 32), and the need for Moses to always be interceding for the people:

"Then Moses said to the LORD, 'See, You say to me, "Bring up this people!" But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, "I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight." Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.' And He said, 'My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.' Then he said to Him, 'If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?' The LORD said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.' Then Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!' **And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion'**" (Exodus 33:12-19).

Here, the assertion from the Lord, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19, NRSV), is a significant display of God's mercy upon corporate Israel, especially in view of how Moses had to appeal to God's sense of justice in not obliterating Israel, and starting over with him:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"' The LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.' Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, 'O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, "With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth"? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people.'

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever." So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exodus 32:7-14).

The scene of the golden calf is often recognized as being one of the most horrific displays of rebellion against the Lord, by His people, throughout the Holy Scriptures. If there were any one incident where God would have had legitimate cause to eliminate Israel and start over with another—this would have been it. But, this is not what happened, and God showed mercy.

9:16-17 When viewed with some of the scenes described by the Apostle Paul, the human sense of justice would not often permit the kind of patience and longsuffering exhibited by the Lord. Paul reminds his Roman audience, that the dealing witnessed in history, "does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy" (v. 16, HCSB). Ironically enough, the example of the Pharaoh of the Exodus is appealed to, as strangely as it may sound, as an example of His mercy: "For the *Tanakh* says to Pharaoh, 'It is for this very reason that I raised you up, so that in connection with you I might demonstrate my power, so that my name might be known throughout the world'" (v. 17), quoting Exodus 9:16. Normally, one would have expected the Lord, witnessing the Ancient Israelites in Egyptian servitude, to just summarily wipe out the Ancient Egyptians and free His oppressed people. But as an act of graciousness to the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God permits them to remain so that His power can be demonstrated:

"Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt.' So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. **But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go**"'" (Exodus 9:8-17).

God's objective with the Egyptians was to make sure that His power be declared throughout the whole of the Earth, by mainly humiliating rather than by destroying, the superpower of the Thirteenth Century B.C.E. Near East. Surely if God can demonstrate some level of tolerance for pagan Egypt, then He will demonstrate an even higher level of tolerance for His chosen Israel!

9:18 Romans 9:18, "So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (RSV), has some complicated history of interpretation associated with it. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1643-1647), for example, asserted from this passage, "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death."⁵⁰ However, the issue in view is God's dealing with the Pharaoh, and in keeping him preserved, so that God's power might be shown to the Egyptians. The

⁵⁰ BibleWorks 9.0: Westminster Standards.

Pharaoh, as the leader of Egypt, was considered to be a living god by his people, and would have been the chief embodiment and representative of them before the God of Israel and before Moses (cf. Exodus 9:14).

Significant questions are posed by the usage of the verb *thelō* (θέλω), generally meaning, “**to have a desire for someth., wish to have, desire, want**” (BDAG).⁵¹ This is to be differentiated from *boulomai* (βούλομαι), which can more definitely involve, “**to plan on a course of action, intend, plan, will**” (BDAG),⁵² with the noun *boulēma* (βούλημα) notably appearing in v. 19 following. V. 18 does not at all need to be read from the viewpoint that the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, meant that Pharaoh was decisively chosen for eternal punishment, without even a remote chance of repentance before his Creator. The hardening of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s heart was for the specific intention that he could be raised up, and his country made an example of. Edwards is keen to detail some of the challenges present in the Exodus narratives, as much of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was actually of his own doing, and not always that of God:

“The case of Pharaoh poses a knotty problem because the hardening of the heart is sometimes attributed to God (Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 10; 11:10) and sometimes to Pharaoh himself (Exod. 7:14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 35; 13:15). Thus, the same tension is maintained in Pharaoh’s case which Paul maintains with regard to the Jews. Pharaoh freely chooses what God ordains. The Book of Exodus is clear that in his hardening Pharaoh pits himself not against Moses but against God, and that God uses Pharaoh’s hardness in order to demonstrate his glory!”⁵³

If the Pharaoh of the Exodus was at all actually “predestined” for eternal punishment, then it needs to be recognized how this is a notable exception, given the fact that there is no record of the Pharaoh ever repenting, that he pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea, and most especially how he believed himself to be a deity. The Pharaoh is, among various others, a prototype of the future antimessiah/antichrist, one who is considered to be “the son of destruction” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), and given his place in future history, may be regarded among a handful of individuals predestined to eternal punishment.

Most individual people, however, are not going to find themselves in the position of being a world leader like Pharaoh or Caesar or the antimessiah. Rather, because God does have to *generally* harden the hearts of people for His purposes, such people will find themselves *specifically* hardened due to their own sin, and their preferred disposition against Him. There are enough attestations from the broad period of Second Temple Judasim, recognizing how the intention to be sinful, is one which human beings most frequently choose themselves, which can then be consequently employed in God’s sovereign purposes for history:

“Do not say, ‘Because of the Lord I left the right way’; for he will not do what he hates. Do not say, ‘It was he who led me astray’; for he had no need of a sinful man. The Lord hates all abominations, and they are not loved by those who fear him. It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him” (Sirach 15:11-17).

“Our works (are) in the choosing and power of our souls, to do right and wrong in the works of our hands, and in your righteousness you oversee human beings” (*Psalms of Solomon* 9:4).⁵⁴

⁵¹ BDAG, 447.

⁵² Ibid., 182.

⁵³ Edwards, 238.

⁵⁴ Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2, 660.

“For R. Hanina said, ‘Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven, as it is said, “And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear” (Deu. 10:12)” (b.Niddah 16b).⁵⁵

The classic Jewish position, on the issues of predetermination, foreknowledge, and human free will, is seen in the Mishnah: “Everything is foreseen, and free choice is given” (m.*Avot* 3:15).⁵⁶ That God has hardened people would have been seen in the widespread, and most unfortunate, common Jewish rejection of Yeshua. But perhaps like the Pharaoh of Egypt, is this a hardening that is entirely by God, or something that is also the result of people choosing to dismiss God’s good purpose, because of their own stumbling (vs. 32-33)? A reader or interpreter needs to perhaps exhibit some caution in approaching v. 18, weighing in some additional factors.

19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

9:19 From vs. 19-23, things do shift a bit more individually, as the Apostle Paul anticipates some responses to his explanation of the corporate election of and mercy toward Israel (vs. 6-16), and God’s raising up of the Pharaoh for His purposes (vs. 17-18). Some are going to say, “So why does he still blame people? Who can stand against his purpose?” (Kingdom New Testament). *Would it not be true that God’s foreordained will for people cannot be stopped?* And this is where some very complicated aspects about the nature of God, His involvement with His human creations, and those human creations’ involvement with Him—get to be probed. Especially important to remember, given frequent debates over God’s sovereignty present in these passages, **is that Paul is reasoning through a widescale First Century Jewish rejection of Yeshua, lamenting it,** and explaining much of it to his audience. Are these people, who are probably going to be condemned, without any choice in the matter? Many Reformed Christians of the past have concluded so, but there are some useful reasons for us to pause, and not draw such a quick conclusion.

9:20-21 While many in Paul’s audience would have presumably wondered whether or not there was any ability for people to resist the intention or purpose of God—objecting to it as though God were unmerciful toward those who would be condemned—Paul directs them along the lines of viewing God as a potter, and human beings as clay. He states, “But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (v. 20, NRSV). There are multiple references seen in Isaiah and Jeremiah, in the Tanach, regarding people as clay, and God as the molder:

“You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, ‘He did not make me’; or what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’” (Isaiah 29:16).

⁵⁵ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

⁵⁶ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 680.