

Email Response to a Friend Regarding Romans Chapter Nine

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Romans chapter nine needs to be read in context with chapters ten and eleven. Paul did not write in chapters. Paul was writing an entire argument throughout many chapters.

In the days of the Reformation, they asked, "Does God predestine individuals?" But in the days of the Paul the question was "has God predestined the Gentiles?" This was a very controversial question in the days of Paul. "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18) "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Rom. 9:24)

Romans 9-11 is Paul's argument for the conditional election of the Israelites, and the grafting in of the Gentiles. He explains how the "chosen" people were cut off because of their unbelief, but that the nations of the Gentiles were grafted in (Rom. 11:17-23).

It was God's predetermined plan to offer salvation to the Gentiles. God said through Abraham "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). And God also said that Israel was to be a "light unto the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6, 42:9). God had always planned (predetermined) to offer salvation to the Gentiles. "For so hath the Lord commanded us saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

Paul explains God's sovereignty over the nations. He chose Jacob (Israel) over Esau (Edom). Jacob and Esau were "two nations" in the "womb" (Gen. 25:23). Jacob was not chosen for unconditional salvation, and Esau was not chosen for unconditional condemnation. Rather, one was chosen to be the lineage of the chosen people, and the other was not. And God also Sovereignly used Egypt as He saw fit, not arbitrarily but wisely. Pharaoh hardened himself in response to what God was doing, and became a reprobate through his own persistence. Therefore God was able to use this circumstance to accomplish His purposes. God uses nations as He sees fit. And Israel cannot find fault with God for cutting them off and grafting in the Gentiles. If God wants to use Israel as a vessel of wrath, because of their rejection, to show forth His wrath, they cannot find fault with God (Rom. 9:19). God has mercy on whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:15). So He chooses to have mercy on those who embrace the Gospel, and He chooses to have wrath on those who reject it (2 Thes. 1:8; 2 Pet. 4:17).

But it should be noted that the potter had an original intention (Gen. 1:26). He did not start out wanting vessels for destruction (Gen. 6:5-6). But the clay mars itself in the hands of the potter (Jer. 18:4), and so the potter makes it into a new vessel as He sees fit (Jer. 18:4). So God was trying to shape Israel to be what He wanted them to be (Isa. 48:18). But they marred themselves in his hands. And so He made them a new vessel, a vessel of wrath, as He saw fit. But He did not do this willingly or eagerly, but with much

long suffering (Rom. 9:22), enduring the vessels that have fitted themselves for destruction (Rom. 9:22). Israel rejected the Gospel and so God made them vessels of wrath. But the Gentiles embraced the Gospel and so God made them vessels of honor (2 Tim. 2:21).

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you [Jews]: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:46)

"Behold, therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them [Israel] which fell severity; but toward thee [Gentiles], goodness, if thou [Gentiles] continue in his goodness: otherwise thou [Gentiles] also shalt be cut off. And they [Israel] also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again." (Rom. 11:22-23)

So Romans 9-11 in context is Paul's argument for God's conditional election of the Gentiles and God's conditional casting away of Israel. God predestined (predetermined) to offer salvation to the Gentiles as well as to the "chosen" people. But it was not the *actual salvation* of any individual that was predestined, it was the *offer of salvation* to a people group that was predestined. God "had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). "God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). "... the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles..." (Acts 28:28). "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Rom. 3:29).

Paul started with a question: "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Rom. 9:24). And he argued to a conclusion: "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith? But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.." (Rom. 9:30-31).

Paul was particularly interested in defending the predestination of the Gentiles because He was personally called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was sent "to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do the works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20). So Paul always took an opportunity to defend God's predetermined plan, and also to reassure the Gentiles that they were also "chosen people".

The Church of Ephesus was made up of Jews [Israel] and Greeks [Gentiles]. "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17). So when Paul wrote to the Church of Ephesus, he reminded them that they were predestined by God. "According as he hath chosen us [Jews & Gentiles] in him before the foundation of the world, that we [Jews & Gentiles] should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us [Jews & Gentiles] unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will..." (Eph. 1:4-5).