

# Romans chapter 9



## A study by JohnnyDZ

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This study is dedicated to James R. White, who believes that only Calvinists have “exegetical capacity”.

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## How Calvinists use Romans 9

Romans chapter nine is considered by Calvinists to unquestionably support their view. But as we shall demonstrate, in spite of their claims, much scripture twisting is required in order to make this passage support Calvinism, even though it is a passage that they consider their own *home court*. James White in his book *The Potters Freedom* writes:

“This tremendous passage of Scripture is so clear, so strong, that it truly does speak for itself.”<sup>1</sup>

“... the Reformed exegete can work with this text by simply allowing it to speak for itself. We are truly on “home court” in Romans 8 and 9.” (emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

Referring to Romans 9:16, R.C. Sproul writes:

“This one verse is absolutely fatal to Arminianism.”<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, if we are going to base doctrines on single verses, with no regard for context, Sproul might be correct. But if that is our hermeneutic, he will be left with no explanation when we discuss John 3:16.

Lets proceed and see how much support Romans 9 really gives to the Calvinist. If James White is correct, we should not find any dishonesty on the part of Calvinists, since the text will *speak for itself*, and we are in the *home court* of the Calvinist.

Lets see how honest the Calvinists are when they already have the *home court* advantage, and only need to let the text speak for itself.

### Ignore the immediate context

The Calvinist interpretation of Romans chapter nine relies on isolating individual verses from their context. I experienced an example of this tendency firsthand recently, when Matt Slick, a defender of the Calvinist view challenged me to a debate. When I suggested Romans chapter 9 as the topic of the debate, Matt attempted to get me to narrow the focus of the debate to only verses 9 through 23. Here is an excerpt from our conversation, which took place on Paltalk on March 6, 2003:

**Matt Slick:** what verses in romans 9

**Matt Slick:** 9-23?

**JohnnyDZ:** the whole chapter

**Matt Slick:** you wanna JUST stick to those?

**JohnnyDZ:** Romans 9 and all the passages that are quoted

The reason for this will become more obvious as we proceed.

My Calvinist friend here did not want to debate on the entire chapter, but only upon a few selected verses which, when taken out of their Biblical and contextual sequence, can be made to sound as though Paul was teaching the Calvinist concept of Unconditional Election.

As it turned out in the end, a formal debate never took place. My would-be opponent later backed out of the debate by refusing to come to an agreement on the terms. I wanted to cover the whole context surrounding these verses, and desired for the debate to last long enough to have a meaningful discussion of the entire chapter.

My would-be opponent however, insisted on a 5 or 10-minute opening statement, obviously intending to isolate a small portion of the chapter and focusing on that.

My belief was that no one could have a truly meaningful discussion of the entire chapter in this amount of time, so the debate never took place.

I studied my opponent's position on Romans 9 nevertheless, which can be found on his *Calvinist Corner* web site. His presentation opens with the following statement:

“Romans 9:9-24 is one of the most intriguing and thought provoking passages in the Bible”.<sup>4</sup>

Does he mean to say here that verses 1-8, and 25-33 of chapter 9 are *not* “intriguing and thought provoking”?

I do not know if that was the intention here, but it is very clear that his study did *not* take into account any of these verses, which comprise *both the introduction and the conclusion* to the chapter.

## Ignore the context of the Old Testament quotations

As we will demonstrate throughout this study, Paul quotes from the Old Testament more in Romans 9 than in any other chapter in the New Testament. (see [Paul's use of Old Testament quotations](#))

Other than passing references to Pharaoh, very rarely do we see Calvinists doing a thorough study of these Old Testament passages which Paul quotes. In fact, the Calvinist interpretation *presumes* that Paul uses all of these quotations *out of context* and with no regard for Biblical precedent.

In fact, if the Calvinist interpretation of Romans chapter nine is correct, and the apostle Paul had really intended the text to teach Calvinism in this passage, he could have been rightly accused of recklessly mishandling the Old Testament scriptures and quoting them totally out of context.

As I shall demonstrate, a charge like this against the apostle Paul would be totally unfounded. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul admonishes Timothy:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

In the letter of second Peter, the author advises us that the apostle Paul's writings come from a wisdom that has been given to him, and they are considered to be as authoritative as the Old Testament scriptures. Is it reasonable to believe that the author would have said this if Paul's teachings contradicted Old Testament passages? I think not. Lets take a look at the passage:

“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,” (2 Peter 3:14-15)

“as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. **There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist** to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” (2 Peter 3:16-17)

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)

The letter of second Peter further informs us that some of Paul’s writings are *hard to understand*, and that ignorant men were twisting them to their own destruction. We are warned ahead of time to know this, and to be careful not to be carried away with the error of these people. We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

So we have been forewarned in scripture. We should always pay careful attention to the scriptures when examining elaborate systematic theologies like Calvinism. If scripture does not support them, they are accounted by God as wood, hay, and stubble to be burned.

## **Ignore the introduction to the chapter**

Does it make sense to study a passage of scripture and to totally ignore the introduction and the conclusion found in that passage? I certainly do not think so. But this tendency seems to be universal among Calvinists.

For example, James White, in his book *The Potters Freedom*, makes only a passing reference to the introduction. This is found on page 206. There is no discussion about any of the elements of the promises made to Israel, and no mention of the significance of the introduction.

And here he erroneously concludes that these verses are a discussion of individuals, without offering any exegetical proof of his assertion. We shall discuss this further when we discuss [Romans 9:6-8](#) later in this article.

## Ignore the conclusion to the chapter

Not only do Calvinists ignore the introduction to the chapter, which sets the context, but they also totally ignore the Apostles own conclusion to what he writes. The Apostle's own conclusion is found in verses 30-33.

Paul's conclusion, which is so clearly set forth and identified with the words *What shall we say, then?*, is his own final conclusion to what he had taught in verses 1-29. Yet this conclusion is utterly ignored by the vast majority of Calvinist theologians, who then erroneously deduce *their own* conclusions from Paul's discussion of Esau, Pharaoh, vessels, etc.

In the Romans nine presentation on Matt Slick's *Calvinist Corner* website, the word *conclusion* appears twice as the author attempts to eisegete Calvinism into these verses. This is done with *absolutely no mention* of verses 30-33, where the real conclusion to the passage is found.

The author seems to believe that the final conclusion is found by extracting something from verses 16 and 18. This mistake on his part should not be surprising, it is the natural result of eliminating Paul's own conclusion from the scope of his study and taking the rest out of context:

“Paul draws a conclusion that needs to be taken very seriously. Verse 16 says ... Then Paul says in verse 18 ... We are forced to a conclusion ...” (emphasis added)<sup>5</sup>

It seems obvious that these conclusions, which Matt Slick derives out of the ninth chapter of Romans, are very premature in the passage. There are various points made along the way, but they all should be understood as leading to the final conclusion. This is what reading a text *in context* means.

And as we shall demonstrate in this study, Slicks conclusions are clearly *not the conclusion* that Paul intended for the text to teach. Paul's conclusion is found in verses 30-33. All we have to do is read it to understand *the correct conclusion* from this chapter.

This tendency among Calvinists to ignore Paul's own conclusion to Romans chapter nine is also demonstrated very succinctly by James White on page 213 of *The Potters Freedom*:

“The passage reaches a crescendo in the final verses” (emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

The passage being discussed here is Romans chapter nine, so when White uses the words *final verses*, a person might at first glance think he was discussing the final verses in the chapter.

This however is *not* the case. These verses, which White here refers to as the *crescendo* and *final verses* are verses 19 and 20!

I could speculate that this was a Freudian slip on the part of James White, and that it is a very revealing glimpse into the thought process of a Calvinist theologian. This statement reveals that in his mind, these verses *really are* the conclusion to the chapter.

He has no interest at all in the rest of the chapter, and because it does not help his case, it is simply ignored. There is no meaningful discussion of any verse from Romans chapter nine in *The Potters Freedom* beyond verse 20. Though verses 21-24 are cited on page 213, there is absolutely no discussion of the rejection of Israel or of the calling of both Jews and Gentiles, which is the *real* crescendo of Romans chapter nine. These things are mentioned in verse 24, but not a single word about them appears in *The Potters Freedom*.

There is absolutely no discussion of any verse in Romans chapter nine beyond verse 24 in the entire book! One looks in vain for any exegesis of these verses. They are simply not addressed. In fairness to James White, we should mention that he begins chapter nine of *The Potters Freedom* with the following statement, as perhaps it might offer some insight into why his book was so negligent to do a thorough study of the entire chapter:

“The student of Scripture that wishes a full discussion of the passage is directed to John Piper’s *The Justification of God*.” (emphasis added)<sup>7</sup>

I looked at Pipers book, intending to find the *full discussion* of Romans chapter nine that was mentioned by White. I suspected that it would be another Calvinist apology that did not include a meaningful discussion of the introduction and conclusion of the chapter. When I looked at Piper’s book, I did not have to go any further than the cover to discover whether or not it covered the entire chapter.

The full title is:

“The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23” by John Piper (emphasis added)

So here we have what is considered to be the best study of Romans nine available, not only by James White, but by the vast majority of Calvinists. 256 pages on Romans nine, and it does not make it beyond verse 23. Needless to say, I do not agree that a book which *skips the conclusion of the chapter* can be considered a *full discussion*. And it is obvious that Calvinists *do not want* a full discussion of Romans chapter nine.

In another place, White ridicules Geisler for making a *single-sentence assertion*, by stating:

“Piper completely refutes this single-sentence assertion over the course of twelve pages of scholarly argumentation”<sup>8</sup>

It is an obvious question, but one I feel necessary to ask. Why does White first claim that the *reformed exegete* can simply let the text speak for itself ...

“... the Reformed exegete can work with this text by simply allowing it to speak for itself ...”<sup>9</sup>

“This tremendous passage of Scripture is so clear, so strong, that it truly does speak for itself.”<sup>10</sup>

... and then proceed to boast about how much *scholarly argumentation* was used by Piper?

It seems very clear that the text is *not* speaking for itself in the Calvinist commentaries, and the conclusion that Paul wrote is totally absent from them.

## Focus on two questions while ignoring the rest

You will find that this ignoring of the context, and the ignoring of Paul's own conclusion to the chapter is the pillar of Calvinist teaching on Romans 9.

Another favorite tactic among Calvinists is to focus on a couple of the questions that are asked in Romans nine. This is demonstrated by Slick:

“As I said before, there is a test in this passage. If you did not ask **the same basic questions** that Paul did **throughout this passage**, then that means that you did not understand what he was saying. But, if you did ask the same basic questions that he did, then that means you did understand what he was saying.” (Emphasis added) <sup>11</sup>

Notice the words *throughout this passage*. We already demonstrated that he does not deal with the whole passage, yet he speaks as though he has actually considered all of the questions in the entire passage!

R.C. Sproul also demonstrates this in his book Chosen by God:

“Paul raises **two rhetorical questions** in this passage that we must consider. **The first** is, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness in God?” ... **The second** objection Paul anticipates is this: “You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” (Emphasis added) <sup>12</sup>

What is wrong with Sproul's statement here? The fact is that there are *ten* questions in Romans 9, not *two*. Here are *all* the questions found in Romans nine, with the ones Sproul says, *we must consider* underlined in red:

1. What shall we say then? (v14)
2. Is there injustice on God's part? (v14)
3. Why does he still find fault? (v19)
4. who can resist his will? (v19)
5. who are you, O man, to answer back to God? (v20)
6. Will what is molded say to its molder, Why have you made me like this? (v20)
7. Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? (v21)
8. What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (v22-24)
9. What shall we say, then? (v30)
10. Why? (v32)

As was demonstrated to be generally true of Calvinists earlier, Sproul ignores all the questions beyond verse 19. Sproul is only concerned with discussing four out of ten questions that are asked in Romans chapter nine. He is perfectly happy ignoring 60% of them, and then building a case against Arminianism with his prematurely truncated list of questions.

Sproul goes on in his book to argue that these questions that he chooses to consider, while ignoring the rest, would never be posed to an Arminian. Therefore he concludes that Arminianism clearly must be wrong, since these questions do not make sense if we pretend they are asked of an Arminian. His next reckless leap in logic is to conclude that if Arminianism is wrong, of course, then Calvinism must be right.

Unfortunately, Sproul's presumptions fail when we consider the simple fact that there were no Calvinists or Arminians around when Paul wrote this book. The fact is that all of these questions can only be understood correctly in light of the context of the entire chapter, and also of chapters 10 and 11.

It is a fact, which is rarely discussed by Calvinists, that the Questions Paul asks and the answers to them were *not original with Paul*. He was quoting Old Testament passages in which a dialogue *between God and Israel* was recorded by the Hebrew prophets. The answers to the two questions that the Calvinists focus on are *both* Old Testament quotations. These are quotations found in Romans 9:20-21, from Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, and Jeremiah 18:6. Calvinists will go on and on about how nobody would ever ask these questions if Paul were an *Arminian*. But they never consider the fact that *Paul was a Jew*, or that he was quoting from Old Testament passages dealing with Israel.

The objections raised in Romans nine come from a perspective that is clearly *Jewish* in nature, since the overall context of the chapter is regarding the hardening and rejection of *Israel*. It is not honest to deal with each question in isolation from its context, and with no regard for the overall thread of the discussion, which is what both Sproul and Slick have done.

As we have seen, several of these questions and their answers are actually *Old Testament quotations*. Once *all* of the questions are addressed, and the *Old Testament context* of these questions and answers is considered, it becomes very clear that the Calvinist interpretation has no biblical support or precedent at all. The Old Testament prophets asked these questions *to Israel*, not to Calvinists or Arminians.

Why would an Arminian object to Israel being hardened? Why would the Arminian object to the truth that God has chosen to show mercy to both the faithful remnant of the Jews and Gentiles also? If we apply Sproul's own argument to *all* of the questions, his method of argumentation utterly fails.

It is Israel objecting here, and the objection is identical to the ones seen elsewhere in scripture. (see the elder brothers objection in the parable of the prodigal son for an example, Luke 15:11-32)

Another Calvinist who makes the same mistake here is John MacArthur:

“In this passage the apostle answers two anticipated questions that are often raised about God's electing some people for salvation while others are left to damnation.” (Emphasis added)<sup>13</sup>

As we have already shown, there are *ten*, not *two* questions in Romans chapter nine. Even if we wish to discuss just the *anticipated* questions, there are *three* of those, not *two*. It is a sad fact that otherwise respectable Bible teachers show a Calvinistic bias in passages like these, which are critical to the defense of Calvinism.

Tremendous volumes have been written by Calvinists regarding these questions, and their supposed psychological impact that Paul supposedly designed them to have.

But we shall proceed to see what the Bible teaches, since it is clear that the Calvinists are not dealing honestly with the passage. As a whole, they all seem guilty of violating the warning found in 2 Peter 3:16-17 regarding Paul's writings.

### Write your own creative and misleading conclusion

Paul's final conclusion to everything that has been said in Romans nine begins in verse 30 with the words: *What shall we say, then?* This marks the final conclusion of the chapter, which extends through verse 33.

Since most of the Calvinists have totally ignored the conclusion to the chapter that Paul wrote, they boldly proceed to write their own.

James White writes his own unique conclusion after discussing verses 21-24, which as we have seen is effectively the end of his discussion of the chapter. This paragraph could be accurately said to be not only a conclusion to Romans chapter nine, but also the thesis of his entire book. The title *The Potters Freedom* was obviously derived from it.

“The Potter’s freedom pulses through these words, flowing inexorably into the sea of sovereignty, rushing any would-be proponent of free will out of its path. God has the perfect right to do with His creation (including men) as He wishes, just as the Potter has utter sovereignty over the clay. Just as God had demonstrated His wrath and power by wasting idolatrous Egypt, so too He demonstrates His wrath upon ‘vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.’”<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting to note that White titles his *entire thesis* on just a few verses, which are isolated from their immediate context and contrary to Old Testament precedent.

White goes on to argue that these *vessels of wrath* are not nations, but individual sinners. Now let's compare White's creative, eloquent, and poetic lie, with the truth of scripture. Does White's preceding elocution sound anything remotely close to Paul's conclusion?

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Romans 9:30-33)

Paul's conclusion contains the following elements, all of which are totally absent from White's conclusion:

1. Gentiles have attained righteousness, even though they had not pursued it.
2. Israel pursued righteousness by the law, but did not succeed in attaining it.
3. Why? Because it is attained by faith, not by the works of the law.
4. Israel failed to attain because they stumbled over the *stumbling stone*.
5. And finally, the Romans nine equivalent to John 3:16, verse 33, which says *whoever believes*.

There is surely no hint of a John 3:16 theology in Whites conclusion, Yet it is the final statement that Paul makes in the chapter.

How can we take James Whites conclusion seriously when it bears no resemblance at all to Paul's own conclusion? Whites conclusion does not include a single point that Paul includes in his. Obviously Paul's conclusion is of much more value in determining the preceding text than White's could ever be. Ignoring these verses is the fatal flaw in Calvinist interpretations of Romans nine. As we shall demonstrate in the rest of this article, none of Whites conclusions are justified by the biblical text.

## What does Romans chapter nine really teach?

### Paul's use of Old Testament quotations

Out of all the chapters in the New Testament, Romans chapter nine has the highest percentage of Old Testament quotations. Out of 33 verses, 18 of them contain quotations from the Old Testament. Expressed as a percentage, this means that over half, nearly 55 percent of the verses in Romans chapter nine, contain Old Testament quotations.

The chapter with the second highest percentage is Acts chapter 7, with 27 out of 60 verses containing Old Testament quotations, for a percentage of 45 percent.

Why does Acts chapter 7 contain the second highest percentage of Old Testament quotations in the entire New Testament? Acts chapter 7 records Stephen's speech before the council of the Sanhedrin, in which he traces Israel's history from the time of Abraham, up until the time of Solomon's temple.

So we see the need of Stephen to rely heavily on the Old Testament scriptures, in his account of the history of Israel before the council. He is addressing Jews, and he uses the Old Testament scriptures with which they were so familiar.

Quotations in Romans 9	
Romans 9:7	Genesis 21:12
Romans 9:9	Genesis 18:10
Romans 9:12	Genesis 25:23
Romans 9:13	Malachi 1:2
Romans 9:13	Malachi 1:3
Romans 9:15	Exodus 33:19
Romans 9:17	Exodus 9:16
Romans 9:20	Isaiah 29:16
Romans 9:20	Isaiah 45:9
Romans 9:21	Jeremiah 18:6
Romans 9:25	Hosea 2:23
Romans 9:26	Hosea 1:10
Romans 9:27	Isaiah 10:22
Romans 9:27	Hosea 1:10
Romans 9:28	Isaiah 10:23
Romans 9:29	Isaiah 1:9
Romans 9:33	Isaiah 8:14
Romans 9:33	Isaiah 28:16

Romans chapter nine is similar, in that it also is addressing a Jewish audience, and also includes a brief account of Israel's history. That Paul's audience included Jews is clear (see Romans 2:17, 4:1).

But why does Romans chapter nine contain the highest percentage of Old Testament quotations? Was it because the apostle Paul was teaching the Calvinist understanding of election and reprobation of individuals, as Calvinists would like for us to believe? Would it be necessary for Paul to rely so heavily on Old Testament scriptures to teach the election and reprobation of individuals?

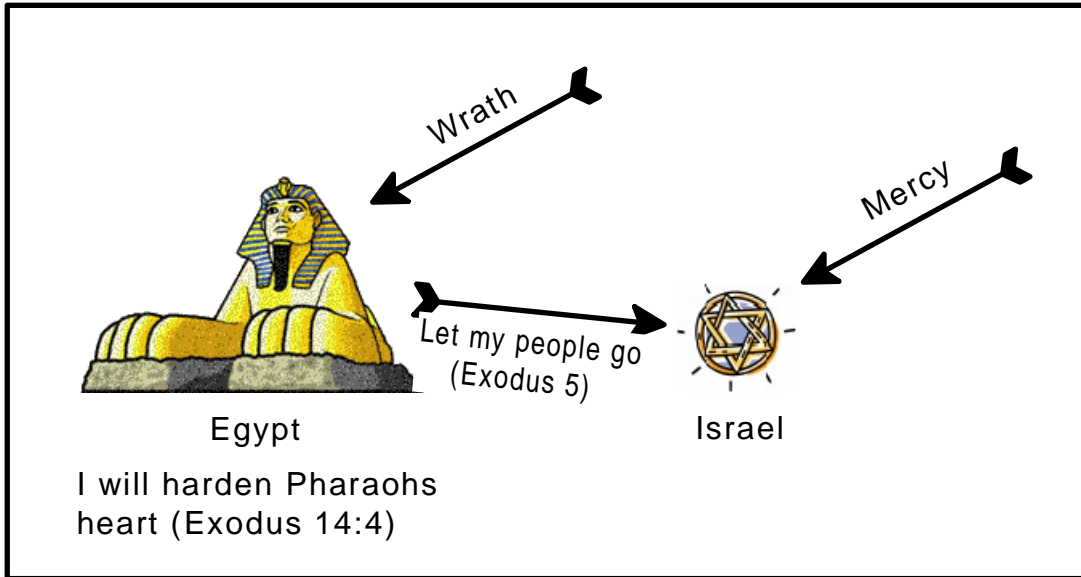
A question that is even more important: was it necessary for Paul to quote so many Old Testament quotations with no regard for their Old Testament context?

I do not believe that the Apostle Paul misquoted 18 Old Testament verses in Romans 9, taking them completely out of context. So let us proceed and take a look at what this chapter is *really* teaching.

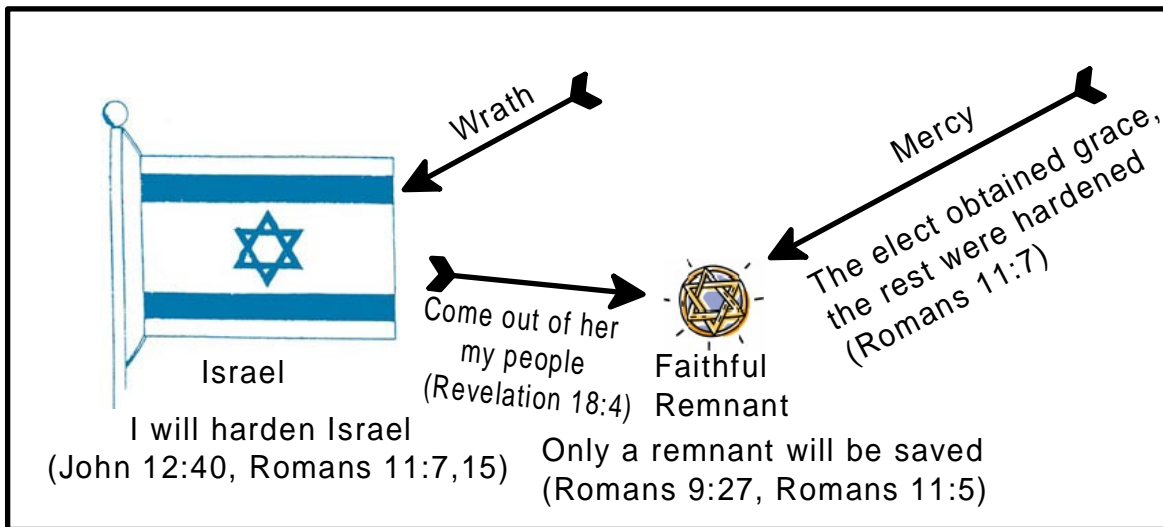
If we proceed carefully through Romans chapter nine, and look at each Old Testament quotation that we encounter in its Old Testament context, this will shed much light on the passage, and help us to understand the points Paul had intended to make when he wrote it.

### Who does God harden?

Paul uses the example of God hardening Pharaoh to demonstrate God’s ability and willingness to harden whosoever he wills. God hardens Pharaoh in order to deliver Israel out of bondage.



“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11)



Paul uses this as an example to demonstrate what God was currently doing. In the first century, Israel was being hardened, in order to deliver a faithful remnant out of her into the Kingdom of God.

In the same way that God hardened Egypt to deliver his chosen people, he was currently hardening Israel for a similar purpose. Here are just a few scriptures which demonstrate this:

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." (John 12:40)

"What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened" (Romans 11:7)

"Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." (Romans 11:25)

That Jerusalem is *symbolically* likened to Egypt is seen in Revelation:

"and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." (Revelation 11:8)

The words *where their Lord was crucified* identify the great city as Jerusalem, and here we have Jerusalem called *Egypt*.

## Who are the Vessels of wrath?

The Calvinist interpretation is that the vessels in Romans nine are representing *individual people*. Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge echoes this view:

"It seems plain from the whole argument of the Apostle in Rom. ix. 9–21, that the "mass" out of which some are chosen and others left, is the mass of fallen men. The design of the sacred writer is to vindicate the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his grace. He has mercy upon one and not on another, according to his own good pleasure, because all are equally unworthy and guilty." (Emphasis added) <sup>15</sup>

Commenting on verses 19-20, James White takes the rhetoric to a higher level:

"These words cannot be understood separately from the fundamental understanding of the freedom of the Sovereign Creator and the ontological creatureliness of man ..." (emphasis added) <sup>16</sup>

While I would agree with White here that God is the Sovereign Creator and that Man is merely a created being, his insistence that these words (in Romans 9) *cannot be understood* in any other way than *his* understanding of the passage is at odds with scripture. The words not only *can* be understood differently than White understands them, but they *are* understood differently, both by Paul, and by the Old Testament prophets.

So we see that the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9:21 would be that the lump is the mass of all humanity, and the vessels are individual human beings. This interpretation fails at two points.

The first problem with this interpretation is that Old Testament precedent unanimously shows that the parable of the Potter and the Clay always speaks *only of Israel*. See the other headings in this study ([Romans 9:21 \(the potter and the clay\)](#), [The parable of the potter and the clay in scripture](#), and [Vessels fitted for destruction](#)) for more discussion of this. So when we arrive at Romans 9:21, we must either throw out the Old Testament context and precedent, or else understand the *lump of clay* to be referring to *Israel*, as the Old Testament prophets did.

To presume that Paul used this question in a way not understood by the prophets, as Calvinists do, is not a good hermeneutic method.

"Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump *one vessel* for honored use and *another* for dishonorable use?" (Romans 9:21)

The second thing we see in this verse is that there are only *two vessels* made from the clay. Who would the Calvinist argue these two individuals are? The belief that the vessels represent multiple billions of individuals is impossible to reconcile with the use of singular language in this verse.

It becomes even more difficult for the Calvinist to explain when we consider that verses 22 and 23 both use the word *vessels* in a plural form. This fact leaves even less room for the linguistic acrobatics which Calvinists are so good at. Paul is obviously capable of using these words in a plural sense, but in verse 21 he deliberately uses a singular form.

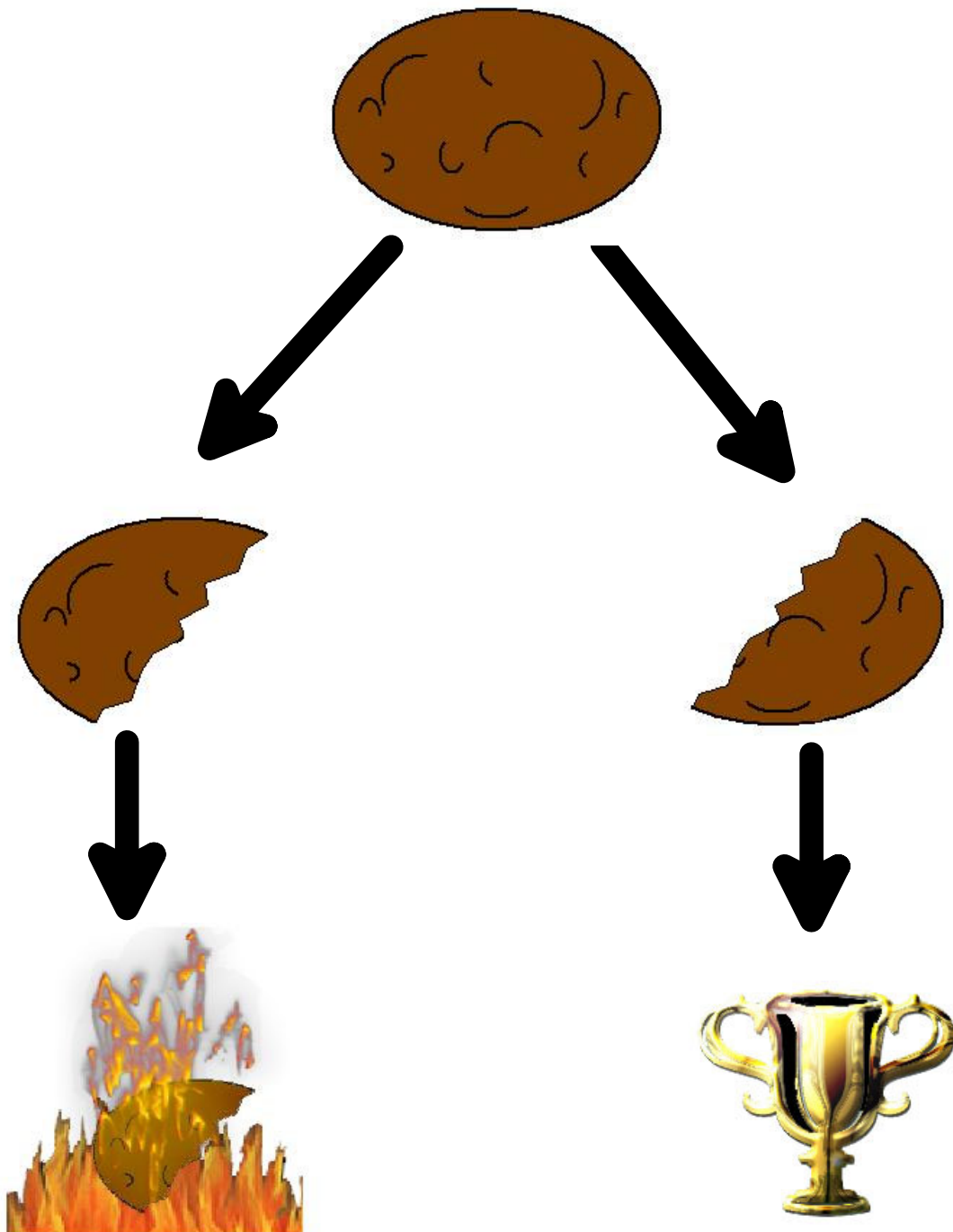
It is very easy to understand what is going on here when we consider the entire context of Romans 9-11.

- Israel is the *same lump*, which is made into *two vessels*.
- The *vessel of wrath* was unbelieving Israel which was cut off and rejected.  
This vessel was to be destroyed in like manner as Sodom and Gomorrah (Romans 9:27-29)
- The *vessel of mercy* was the faithful remnant within Israel (Romans 9:27, 11:15)
- The *vessel of mercy* would also include Gentiles (Romans 9:24-26)

This is the correct interpretation. It is derived entirely from Biblical context, and without violating Old Testament precedent for the imagery used here. The Calvinist cannot make these claims with their interpretation, and they will focus on Greek grammar and other issues in order to avoid Biblical precedent and Old Testament context.

The illustration on the following page shows the correct understanding of this.

One Lump, Israel  
(Jeremiah 18)



One Vessel for  
dishonorable use  
(Romans 9:21)

One Vessel for honored  
use (Romans 9:21)

## The correct interpretation

The teaching of Paul in Romans nine is not original with Paul. The same things had been taught by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus himself had also taught them. The central theme of Romans nine is identical to the following passage:

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:11-12)

Here is the correct interpretation in as few words as possible:

- Israel has been hardened, blinded, and rejected due to unbelief. (Matthew 13:10-15; John 12:40; Romans 11:7-10, 20, 25)
- But not all of Israel is cut off, there is a faithful remnant that will be saved. (Romans 9:27; 11:5)
- In addition to the remnant, the Gentiles will be grafted in to replace the unfaithful. (Romans 9:24-26, 30; 11:11-12, 25)
- God’s Sovereign right to do all of these things, and the fact that he would do them, had both been foretold in the Old Testament prophets (Romans 9-11)

Proof of all of these conclusions will be offered in the verse-by-verse study that follows. The following chart summarizes the differences between my method of interpretation, and the method used by Calvinists.

<b>Method of understanding the correct interpretation of Romans 9</b>	<b>Me</b>	<b>Calvinists</b>
Pay attention to the introduction (v1-5)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to the conclusion (v30-33)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to the immediate context	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to the context and meaning of chapters 10 and 11	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to the use of Old Testament Quotations	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to the context in which Old Testament Quotations are found	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to Biblical precedent of parables (such as the Potter and Clay)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Pay attention to Biblical usage of figures of speech (such as metonymy)	<b>Yes</b>	No
Take verses out of context	No	<b>Yes</b>
Ignore Paul’s conclusion and write a new one	No	<b>Yes</b>
Focus on dissecting Greek grammar while ignoring Biblical precedent (strain out gnats while swallowing camels)	No	<b>Yes</b>

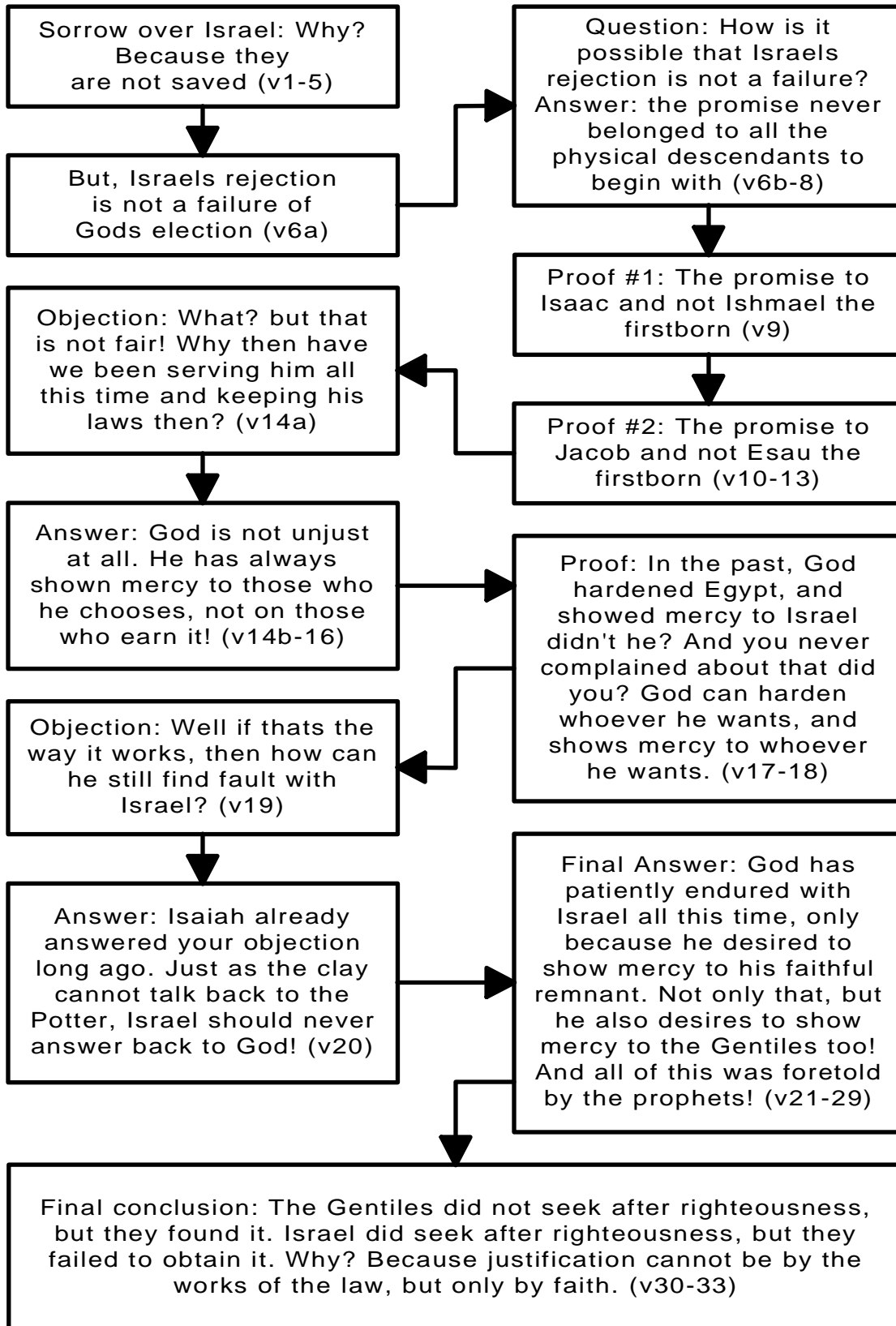
Now that we have established a preliminary overview of the chapter, we are able to trace the line of Paul's thinking through the entire chapter.

The outline presented is based upon careful observation of the following facts:

1. The context of the chapter is *the nation of Israel*, as introduced in verses 1-5
2. The conclusion of the chapter is the rejection of unbelieving *Israel*, and the acceptance of the Gentiles as clearly stated in verses 30-33
3. Everything that falls between the introduction and conclusion *must* lie within the scope of this context, unless there is a clear textual deviation from it. (which is *not* seen)
4. Sixteen Old Testament quotations lie between the introduction and the conclusion, and Eighteen in the whole passage. All of which must also *be taken out of Old Testament context* if we deviate from Paul's context.

The chart that follows on the next page will demonstrate the correct line of reasoning through the text, and will serve to simplify the logic. As can be seen, there is never any need for a break in the context to discuss election of individuals.

**The outline and flow of the chapter**



## Verse by verse study of Romans 9

### Romans 9:1-3 (Paul's sorrow because of Israel)

“I am speaking the truth in Christ- I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit- that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” (Romans 9:1-3)

Paul begins his thesis on the election, and subsequent rejection of Israel with a threefold oath. This demonstrates his love for his kinsmen and his nation, and the seriousness of the rest of the passage.

### Romans 9:4-5 (the promises made to the Patriarchs)

“They are **Israelites**, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5)

Here Paul describes the particular blessings that belonged only to the nation of Israel. In order to establish the Old Testament context for these blessings, I will quote a few verses here that are relevant to our discussion.

First of all, adoption: this is a national election of Israel into service for God.

“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD, **Israel is my firstborn son**“ (Exodus 4:22)

“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has **chosen** you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD **set his love on you and chose you**, for you were the fewest of all peoples,” (Deuteronomy 7:7)

“but it is because the LORD loves you and is **keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers**, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:8)

“For **the LORD has chosen Jacob** for himself, **Israel** as his own possession.” (Psalm 135:4)

“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and **Israel my chosen**, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.” (Isaiah 45:4)

Secondly, is the covenant. The covenant promise is particularly related to the promise of national blessing.

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my **covenant** between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” (Genesis 17:1-2)

“Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, Behold, my **covenant** is with you, and **you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.**” (Genesis 17:3-4)

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but **your name shall be Abraham**, for I have made you **the father of a multitude of nations.** I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and **I will make you into nations**, and kings shall come from you.” (Genesis 17:5-6)

The name Abram means a high father or exalted father. The name Abraham means *father of many nations*.

“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” (Genesis 17:7)

*The Christ who is God over all.* This is the promise of the coming messiah which was given to the nation of Israel. The context for the rest of the chapter begins here, and does not depart from it. In fact, the context is the nation of Israel until the end of chapter eleven.

### **Romans 9:6-8 (the children of the flesh and of the promise)**

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are **children of Abraham** because they are his offspring, but **Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.** 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.**” (Romans 9:6-8)

It is not as though the word of God has failed. What is Paul talking about here? Calvinism? What word of God was he talking about? The context tells us. The word of God he refers to is the Old Testament scriptures, and the promises made to the nation of Israel. The adoption, glory, covenants, giving of the law, worship, promises, and finally Christ himself.

All of these were promises that had been made *to Israel*. Why would the question arise that the word of God could fail? Because, as a whole, Israel had not accepted Christ as her savior and Messiah. If Paul were addressing only individuals as Calvinists assert, there would have been no need to address this problem.

The decree of God was not one of good news for the nation of Israel. It was a message of impending judgment. First the Old Testament prophets, then John the Baptist, followed by Jesus, and finally by the Apostles. They all taught the same thing, that Israel was about to be judged.

No one could be sure of their salvation by their genealogical records alone. Repentance and faith were now required. Only the *children of promise* are counted as offspring.

“He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Luke 3:7-8)

These words, *We have Abraham as our father*, were what many of the Jews were trusting in. They considered themselves to be Holy, and all the Gentile nations as dogs because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. They preserved their genealogical records above all else. This is exactly the issue that Paul is addressing in Romans nine.

Since most of these who were physical descendants of Abraham had rejected Christ, Paul is also concerned with the question: what about all the promises that were made to Israel? Why have they not been fulfilled? A very common question, and we have people still today, almost 2000 years later, still trying to answer that question. Romans chapters nine through eleven contain Paul’s answer to this question.

John Calvin comments here:

“I adopt the common reading, *Not however that it had failed*, and according to this sense, That **I deplore the destruction of my nation** is not because I think the promise, given formerly by God to Abraham, is now void or abolished.” (emphasis added)<sup>17</sup>

So we see John Calvin at this point agrees with me. The reason for Paul’s sorrow in verses 1-3 is because of the destruction of his *nation*, yet he refused to see this as a failure of God to keep his promises. He saw the failure as a failure on the part of Israel, who fell into unbelief. This is very clear later on in chapter eleven.

“That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.” (Romans 11:20)

Notice that in Romans 11:20, the reason given for Israel’s rejection is not predestination, but *because of their own unbelief*.

As we have seen before, this theme was not new with Paul. In fact, it had been one of the central themes of Jesus himself:

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:11-12)

This theme sets the context for the entire chapter, and not only this chapter, but chapters 10 and 11 as well. At no point in the chapter is there a deviation or departure from this theme into a discussion of election or reprobation of individuals. Those who defend the Calvinist interpretation are in the unfortunate position of having to demonstrate such a change in context.

The Calvinist must change the context from the nation of Israel to individuals at some point between verses 5 and 13 if they want to assert that God hated the individual named Esau.

As we shall see later, John Calvin did not believe that God hated the individual named Esau, so he avoided the dilemma at this point, and attempted to change the context later in the passage.

When we get to verse 16, we will see that James White argues that there is no change in context in the preceding verses back to verse 13. If the context is election of Israel in verses 1-5, and election of individuals in verse 13 as White claims, then it ***had to have changed*** at some point before verse 13.

So keeping in mind here that James White is in disagreement with Calvin, which we will show when we get to verse 13, lets take a look at how and where he attempts to change the context, and what his argumentation consists of:

"It should be noted that this immediately raises an important point: *Paul is speaking of individual salvation. **It makes no sense*** to say "I could wish myself were accursed for the sake of the nation of Israel so that it might be returned to a position of receiving national privileges and favor. (emphasis added)"<sup>18</sup>

This is all that White offers as a reason why we should believe that Paul was not talking about the ***nation of Israel. It makes no sense***. He offers no exegetical support for his proposition at all.

He cites no other theologians, Calvinist, Arminian, or otherwise, who agree with his line of reasoning. Nothing except the statement: ***It makes no sense***. He does not even give a logical reason ***why*** it makes no sense.

If he had consulted John Calvin's commentary on Romans 9:4, he would have discovered that Calvin had actually studied the passage, and came to a conclusion totally the opposite as his.

Unfortunately, in ***The Potters Freedom***, James White did not bother to take the time to interact in any meaningful manner with John Calvin on this verse. If he had done so, he would have also noted that Calvin saw a distinct parallel to Exodus 32:32 in his commentary:

"In like manner this anxiety took hold on Moses, when he desired that he should be blotted out of the book of life, rather than that the holy and chosen race of Abraham should be reduced to nothing."<sup>19</sup>

In Exodus chapter 32, Moses offers up his own life to be blotted out, if God would forgive the sin of the children of Israel:

"But now, if you will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." (Exodus 32:32)

Did it ***make sense*** for Moses to be willing to give his life for the nation of Israel? According to James White, I guess not. How about in John 11:50, where a similar idea is seen?

“Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” (John 11:50)

John Calvin thought it made perfect sense. Many noble men in the History of the United States have given their lives for their country. What part of this *makes no sense* to James White? He does not elaborate, so we can only guess.

I think we have to dismiss James Whites argument that these scriptures *make no sense* as a *non-response*. Since he offers no valid reason *why* it *makes no sense*, his assertion is an unfounded one.

So now that we have ruled out the misguided notion that there has been a change in the context, what are verses 6-8 really talking about? Lets take a look at Genesis 21:10-12, which is quoted in verse 7.

“So she [Sarah] said to Abraham, Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” (Genesis 21:10)

“But God said to Abraham, Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for **through Isaac shall your offspring be named.**” (Genesis 21:12)

“And I will make a **nation** of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” (Genesis 21:13)

“And **God heard the voice of the boy**, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for **God has heard the voice of the boy** where he is.” (Genesis 21:17)

“Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for **I will make him into a great nation.**” (Genesis 21:18)

“And **God was with the boy**, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.” (Genesis 21:20)

Is there any mention of anyone being elected to heaven or hell in these verses? No there is not. It was spoken by God that Ishmael would not be heir of the promise, but that it would be the son of Sarah. As we know from verses 1-5, the promise being spoken of here is the promise to Abraham, the *Father of nations*.

Was the promise made to Abraham related to eternal salvation or damnation? No. Was there anything said about the gospel, or being able to believe the gospel? No. The promise was related to *nations and kings*. (Genesis 17:16)

Is there any indication in these verses that God *hated Ishmael* and damned him to hell? No. In fact, it appears that even though Ishmael's birth had not been a part of the promise of God, that God blessed him anyway because he was Abraham's son.

It is said *God has heard the voice of the boy*, and *God was with the boy*. God also promises to bless him, and *make him into a great nation*. These things do not lead a person to believe that the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity could be applied to Ishmael.

Paul here shows that the promises were not necessarily to the *physical* descendants of Abraham, but to the children of *faith*. This was contrary to what was commonly believed among the Jews, but beginning with John the Baptist this message was proclaimed:

“And do not presume to say to yourselves, **We have Abraham as our father**, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Matthew 3:9)

“They answered him, **Abraham is our father**. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did” (John 8:39)

The promise is received by faith, not by birthright.

### **Romans 9:9 (the promise to Abraham)**

“For this is what the promise said: About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” (Romans 9:9)

This verse is quoting the promise made in Genesis 18:10:

“The LORD said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.” (Genesis 18:10)

“The LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that **Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?**” (Genesis 18:17-18)

Once again, in the promise to Abraham concerning Isaac, the promise is clearly repeated here that he would become *a great and mighty nation*, and that *all nations would be blessed in him*.

In the context of the passage which Paul cites, there is no mention of election of individuals to heaven or hell. There is no mention of anyone being prevented from believing the gospel, as Calvinists assert this chapter is teaching. The promise is about *nations*, and in particular, the nation of *Israel*.

## Romans 9:10-12 (the older will serve the younger)

“And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 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- she was told, **The older will serve the younger.**” (Romans 9:10-12)

The quotation in this passage is from Genesis 25:22-23

“The children struggled together within her, and she said, If it is thus, why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, **Two nations are in your womb**, and two **peoples** from within you shall be divided; **the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.**” (Genesis 25:22-23)

When we look at the context of the quotation, it is plain and obvious that the words *the older shall serve the younger* are not speaking of individuals. It is clearly speaking of two *nations* and two *peoples*.

For reasons why this prophecy cannot refer to individuals, see [Ten Biblical reasons why God did not hate Esau](#) Later in this study.

In spite of how clear Genesis 25:22 makes this, many Calvinists go to great lengths to avoid the obvious conclusion. They desire to ignore the fact that the prophecy concerned the *nations* which would arise from the descendants of Jacob and Esau, to use the verse as a proof text showing God's hate for the reprobate.

James White in *The Potters Freedom*, in his incomplete and inadequate discussion of Romans chapter nine, does not mention this quotation from Genesis at all. In fact, the only place in *The Potters Freedom* where any reference at all to Genesis 25 appears is on page 216, where it is included in a quotation from Norman Geisler's book, *Chosen But Free*.

White obviously avoids dealing with the passage because it is devastating to his position. He does not quote Genesis 25 at all. He offers no exegesis at all. Even though it is contained in a quotation from *Chosen But Free*, which James White quotes, *The Potters Freedom* makes no mention of it at all. This is especially ironic when we look at White's response to the citation that contains the reference:

“With all due respect to Dr. Geisler, **this is a “non-response”** that does not focus upon the text at all. There is **no exegesis with which to interact.**” (emphasis added)<sup>20</sup>

To use Whites familiar manner of speaking: White does not exegete or interact with Genesis 25:22-23 *at all*. If a person cites scripture, and you refuse to look at it or consider it, who is it that truly did not respond? Obviously, it is James White who offers up a *non-response* here.

Instead of dealing with the scripture that Dr. Geisler quoted to support his position, James White spends the next several paragraphs whining and complaining that Geisler had not responded sufficiently enough to a commentary of Romans nine written by John Piper, another hyper-Calvinist.

I did a little bit of research after I discovered this. I searched the scripture index in the back of *The Potters Freedom* for any mention of the 18 Old Testament verses that the apostle Paul quotes from in Romans nine.

The chapter of *The Potters Freedom* that deals with Romans 9 does not exegete a single one of them! Not one!

In fact, other than a passing reference to Jeremiah 18, which we will take a look at later, there is no mention of any of these Old Testament verses at all!

References to Malachi 1:2-3, Exodus 9:16, and Jeremiah 18:6 appear in *The Potters Freedom* only because they were part of *quotations* from *Chosen But Free*! But White makes no attempt to interact at all with Geisler's scriptural arguments, all the while claiming that Geisler *offers no exegesis*.

## Romans 9:13 (Jacob I Loved, Esau I hated)

“As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Romans 9:13)

Here we have one of the favorite proof-texts of Hyper-Calvinists. They will proudly point to this verse and say “see, God hates people!” Here is the proof!

Nothing could be farther from the truth. This is a perfect example of one of those passages that 2 Peter 3:16 was referring to when it said that *the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction*.

Dr. Norman Geisler, in his book *Chosen But Free* comments on this verse:

“Few scriptural texts are more misused by extreme Calvinists than this one.”<sup>21</sup>

Many Calvinists assume that because verses 11 and 12 contain quotations of prophecies that were spoken before the twins were born, that verse 13 was also spoken before they were born.

This is not the case. The quotation in verse 13 is taken from Malachi chapter one, which was written long after Jacob and Esau had lived and died. In fact, *over 1500 years* separate the quotation in verse 12 from the quotation in verse 13:

“The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, How have you loved us? Is not Esau Jacob's brother? declares the LORD. Yet **I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated**. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” (Malachi 1:1-3)

It should be obvious from the context of the quotation in Malachi that it concerns the *nations of Israel and Edom*. So obvious in fact, that it is impossible to take any theologian or teacher seriously who claims this verse is teaching about God's hatred for the individual named Esau.

The language is all in the past tense. I *have* loved, I *have* hated, I *have* laid waste. These verses are speaking of *past* events. They clearly are *not* speaking of the unconditional election and reprobation of individuals from before the foundation of the world.

John Calvin demonstrated enough honesty and commitment to the Biblical text to understand that this verse was speaking of *nations*, and *not* of the individuals. Calvin testifies of this both in his commentary on Romans and in the Institutes. James White, however, unashamedly proceeds to eisegete his theological slant, individual election, into this verse.

Calvin writes:

“Accordingly, Malachi enlarges on the ingratitude of Israel, in that being not only selected from the whole human race, but set peculiarly apart from a sacred household; they perfidiously and impiously spurn God their beneficent parent. “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord: **yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau,**” (Mal. 1:2, 3) ... The words, “Jacob have I loved,” refer to the whole progeny of the patriarch, which the prophet there opposes to the posterity of Esau.” (emphasis added)<sup>22</sup>

Also see John Calvin’s commentary on Romans 9:12-13, as he elaborates further on the lives of the individuals, and concludes that *the promise was not fulfilled* in the two individuals.

One modern day Calvinist, who is also honest to the text of scripture when commenting on this verse, is John MacArthur:

“Actual emotional hatred for Esau and his offspring is not the point here. Malachi, who wrote this declaration more than 1,500 years after their death, was looking back at these two men—**and by extension the nations (Israel and Edom)** that came from their loins. God chose one for divine blessing and protection, and the other He left to divine judgment.” (emphasis added)<sup>23</sup>

James White states his position, which seems to be a good summary of the extreme Calvinist position:

“How much more plainly can it be stated? **The context is clearly personal:** Pharaoh was a person, as were Jacob and Esau. God shows mercy to individuals, and, likewise, whether we like it or not, He hardens individuals as well. This is predestination, plain and clear.” (emphasis added)<sup>24</sup>

As a side note, many Calvinists will object to the terms *moderate* and *extreme* or *hyper* when applied to Calvinism, as though Calvinism is a monolith. But we have just demonstrated that White (and many other Calvinists) holds a position that goes further than that of John Calvin.

As we have already shown, and shall demonstrate further, the context is *not* clearly personal, as White states. He begs the question, offering no proof from scripture. While there is no doubt that these people were individuals, and at first glance we could jump to the conclusion as White does, we must look to Biblical precedent for understanding. Calvin did just that, and took the opposite position as White at this point in the text, as we have seen.

To conclude that everything in the chapter is speaking of individual election and reprobation, as we have shown, and will further prove, would violate both the immediate context, and also the precedent of the Old Testament prophets.

As is the case with *all* of the Old Testament quotations in Romans nine, *The Potters Freedom* does not offer any meaningful response to Malachi chapter one. A one-sentence reference to the passage appears on pages 215-216, but even that appears solely because it is contained in a quotation from *Chosen But Free*.

White makes no effort at an exegetical response to Geisler's statements about Malachi chapter one speaking of nations. There is absolutely no mention of the fact that in Malachi 1:1 the prophecy is addressed to the *nation of Israel*. As is consistent throughout *The Potters Freedom*, White does not interact in any meaningful way with the Old Testament prophets.

The language in this verse is difficult to the English reader of today, because Paul quotes directly from the Old Testament prophet Malachi, who used a figure of speech in the Hebrew custom that is seen so frequently in the Bible.

E.W. Bullinger, in his classic work, *Figures of speech in the Bible*, identifies this language concerning Jacob and Esau in Malachi as a figure of speech known as a *metonymy*. The word metonymy is not a household word that we hear a lot, but we actually use it in our language every day. Here is the dictionary definition from a couple of sources:

A metonymy is "A figure of speech which consists in substituting for the name of a thing the name of an attribute of it or of something closely related."<sup>25</sup>

(me-ton-y-my) n., pl. metonymies. A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of Washington for the United States government or of the sword for military power.<sup>26</sup>

In scripture, the names of Jacob and Israel, and Esau and Edom, are substituted frequently, and used and understood interchangeably.

The proof of this is found in literally hundreds of verses in the Bible. I will demonstrate just a few of these.

First of all, we have the Biblical account of when God changes Jacob's name to Israel:

"Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called **Jacob**, but **Israel**, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Genesis 32:28)

From this point forward in the scriptures, we see the names Jacob and Israel used interchangeably. The metonymy is used poetically, symbolically, and in other ways. Notice in these verses, not only are Jacob and Israel understood metonymously, but both names are used in the same verse for emphasis.

“And God spoke to **Israel** in visions of the night and said, **Jacob**, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.” (Genesis 46:2)

“Assemble and listen, O sons of **Jacob**, listen to **Israel** your father.” (Genesis 49:2)

“How lovely are your tents, O **Jacob**, your encampments, O **Israel**!” (Numbers 24:5)

“For the LORD has chosen **Jacob** for himself, **Israel** as his own possession.” (Psalm 135:4)

In addition to these, we also have a clear example of Paul himself using the metonymy right here in the context of the passage that we are studying. This is found in Romans 11:26, in which Paul is quoting from Isaiah 59:21.

“And in this way all **Israel** will be saved, as it is written, **The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob;**” (Romans 11:26)

The word Israel is not found in the quotation. In fact, it *does not appear at all* in chapter 59 of Isaiah, where this quotation is taken from. The name Jacob is used metonymously, even though Jacob had died over 1000 years before it was written.

So we see that not only was the apostle Paul familiar with the Jacob - Israel metonymy, he actually uses it himself in the very passage of scripture we are studying. The apostle here quotes a verse that speaks of Jacob, and applies it to Israel. He offers no explanation for this, it is just expected that the reader understands.

The same thing is true of Esau in scripture. The name Esau is used as a metonymy for Edom. Even though I have already clearly established this principle from scripture with Jacob, since this is such a critical passage for Calvinists, I will give a few proofs of this for Esau as well.

“And **Esau** said to Jacob, Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted! Therefore his name was called **Edom**.” (Genesis 25:30)

As Jacobs name was changed to Israel, Esau’s name was also changed to Edom. Scholars are divided over the etymology of the name Edom. Some believe it means *red*, for the color of the stew here. Others believe it means *hairy*.

Because the etymology is unclear, we see even in the pages of scripture clarification in several places that Esau and Edom are metonymous of the same person.

“These are the generations of **Esau**, (that is, **Edom**).” (Genesis 36:1)

“These are the sons of **Esau**, (that is, **Edom**), and these are their chiefs.” (Genesis 36:19)

“Will I not on that day, declares the LORD, destroy the wise men out of **Edom**, and understanding out of Mount **Esau**?” (Obadiah 1:8)

Finally, the very passage that Paul quotes from contains the metonymy, both of Jacob and Esau, to refer to Israel and Edom:

“Yet I have loved Jacob but **Esau** I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If **Edom** says, We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, the LORD of hosts says, **They** may build, but I will tear down, and **they** will be called the wicked country, and **the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.**” (Malachi 1:2b-4)

Notice that it is *the people*, plural, that God is angry with here. Not Esau the individual.

It should really be obvious just from reading Malachi chapter one that Romans 9:13 is not speaking of an individual, but a nation, when it says *Esau have I hated*. But for those who are harder to convince, I have offered even more overwhelming biblical proof in a later chapter. See [Ten Biblical reasons why God did not hate Esau](#).

There is absolutely no substantiation for believing that this verse teaches that God hates people, as even John Calvin himself admitted both in his commentary, and in the Institutes.

The Calvinist interpretation has been demonstrated beyond any shadow of doubt to be incorrect. In fact, ironic as it may sound, John Calvin did not hold to the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9:13.

If Paul intended to teach that God reprobates individuals in verse 13, then he could rightly be accused of quoting an Old Testament passage out of context, and breaking with thousands of years of Biblical precedent.

### **Romans 9:14-15 (I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy)**

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Romans 9:14-15)

The quotation here is from Exodus 33, where Moses intercedes for the nation of Israel. The context in Romans is still nations, it has not changed. Individual election is not what is being taught here. The Calvinist at this point attempts to ignore the preceding context and the context of the Old Testament passage, and claim that God had mercy only upon Moses as an individual.

But if we consider that the promise of mercy was inseparably linked to Abraham’s offspring becoming a mighty nation, as God had promised, the Calvinist interpretation again fails. Moses the individual *did not* enter into the Promised Land.

It is also very clear in the context of the passage being quoted by Paul that Moses is not speaking only for himself, but is interceding for the nation of Israel.

“Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. **Consider too that this nation is your people.** And he said, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:13-14)

“And he said to him, If your presence will not go with me, do not bring **us** up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, **I and your people?** Is it not in your going with **us**, so that **we** are distinct, **I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?**” (Exodus 33:15-16)

“And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name The LORD. And **I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.**” (Exodus 33:19)

Notice that the language shows clearly that Moses is interceding for *this nation, us, we, and your people*. Moses is not the only person involved here, so it would be erroneous for anyone to conclude Paul was speaking of Moses *as an individual*.

The next chapter, Exodus 34, shows the fulfillment and revelation of the promise of this mercy, when God revealed his glory to Moses:

“The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” (Exodus 34:5-6)

“keeping steadfast love **for thousands**, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.” (Exodus 34:7-8)

Here we see that not only are God and Moses speaking of the fate of the children of Israel, but also their children, even to future generations. There can be no doubt that the context of the quotation dictates that we understand this statement to be showing mercy to *Israel*, not Moses as an individual. As the text continues, Moses continues to intercede for Israel, and the plurality in his words leave no doubt.

“And he said, If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of **us**, for it is a stiff-necked **people**, and pardon **our** iniquity and **our** sin, and take **us** for your inheritance.” (Exodus 34:9)

“And he said, “**Behold, I am making a covenant.** Before **all your people** I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any **nation**. And **all the people** among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.” (Exodus 34:10)

So again, we see that there is nothing in the Old Testament context here that demands us to see a change in the context of Romans chapter nine. The context is clearly not the eternal salvation or reprobation of individuals, but of the national election of *Israel*, and God's covenant with *a nation*.

**Romans 9:16 (not dependent on who wills or runs)**

“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” (Romans 9:16, NASB)

This is another critical verse, because it is a favorite proof text for Calvinists. Once again in this verse, the Calvinist will insist that the verse is talking about individuals being saved. This verse is used to demonstrate the total inability of man, and the unconditional election of individuals to salvation or reprobation.

If the context has not changed at this point, then we need to understand the *willing* and *running* in this verse to be speaking of *nations*, not individuals. I see no indication in the text of Romans nine that we should suddenly change the context away from the election and subsequent rejection of Israel.

I am not alone in seeing no indication in the text of a change in context. In this citation from *The Potters Freedom*, James White who is assuming the context of the whole chapter is about *individuals* being elected, argues that there has been no change in the context:

“Is there some massive change in the context between verses 13 and 16? No, there is not ...”<sup>27</sup>

While he agrees with me that there is no change in context, he believes the context is *individuals*. At least we have an admission here that there is no justification in the text for a change in the context, for there is none. Unfortunately, White has the whole passage upside down.

So how does White read individual election into the verse? As we have already shown, he totally ignores the context, and focuses on individual words. He claims that it is not feasible to even consider how a nation could *will* or *run*.

“The interpretation that attempts to limit Romans 9 to “nations” cannot begin to explain how nations “will” or “run”.” (emphasis added)<sup>28</sup>

White is begging the question here. He offers absolutely no biblical evidence to support his claim that a nation could never *will* or *run*. We are supposed to believe that a nation could never *will* or *run* simply because White says so.

If he had made a statement such as: I did extensive research in the scriptures on this, and found no support for the notion that a nation could *will* or *run* anywhere ... then we might take White’s remark here a little more seriously. But in fact, the scriptures *do* portray nations as *both* willing and running.

As we showed in the introduction of this article, Whites discussion of Romans nine effectively ends with verse 20. So we should not be surprised that White is totally unaware of the language which follows that describes Israel as a nation *pursuing*, both *willing and running* after righteousness, yet not attaining it. And also the Gentile nations as *not pursuing* i.e. *willing or running*, yet still attaining. (see Romans 9:30-32)

When we get to Romans 9:29, which White never considers, we shall see that Paul quotes from Isaiah 1:9. In this chapter, it is shown that the nation of Israel needed to be *willing* in order to continue to dwell in the land. That White is unaware of this is further proof that he has not done any serious study of any of these Old Testament quotations that are used by the apostle Paul:

“If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.” (Isaiah 1:9)

In the same chapter in which this quotation is taken from, and which Paul describes as Israel, we find a promise that if the *nation* is *willing*, they would receive blessings.

“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity ... If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 1:4, 19-20)

In Isaiah 55:5 we see more language, which portrays a *gentile nation* as *running*. This shows that in Old Testament precedent, this type of language is common:

“Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.” (Isaiah 55:5)

Furthermore, even the immediate context in Romans has to be totally ignored to extract election of individuals out of this verse. It is the nation of Israel that *wills* and *runs*, as the following scriptures in this same passage demonstrate:

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.” (Romans 9:30-31)

“I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.” (Romans 10:2-3)

“But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry. Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” (Romans 10:19-20)

These verses, which all appear in the immediate context of Romans nine, clearly show nations *pursuing*, *asking*, *seeking*, and even *being jealous* and having *zeal*. Of course, White would not be aware of any of this, since he ended his study once he got to verse 20, so we can understand his seeming ignorance of these facts.

Apparently White is unaware of the historic understanding of this verse also. He does not interact at all with any of the historic commentators in any meaningful way. Dating at least back to Turretin, this

verse was understood not to apply to individuals living today, but to the Old Testament scriptures describing the events surrounding Isaac's blessing of Jacob, even though he *willed* to bless Esau, and Esau *running* hastily to go fetch his father some meat to eat. The *will* of Isaac and the *running* of Esau was in vain.

John MacArthur echoes the historic interpretation:

“Those who receive God’s mercy receive it solely by His grace. Ishmael **desired** the blessing but failed to receive it. Esau **ran** for the blessing, as it were, but also failed to receive it.”<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, the only way this verse can be teaching the election of individuals is if we isolate it from its context and Biblical precedent.

### **Romans 9:17-18 (the hardening of Pharaohs heart)**

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” (Romans 9:17-18)

The verse contains a quotation from Exodus 9:16:

“But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16)

This is another of the Calvinists favorite proof texts. A brief look at the history of Israel in Egypt will help us to better understand the passage.

The captivity of Israel in Egypt began with Joseph being sold by his brothers into slavery, to none other than the Ishmaelites, the children of Abraham by the bondwoman. This account is found in Genesis 37:27-28.

Later on, Joseph's interpretation of Pharaohs dream brought him out of prison and into the second highest position in all of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself.

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:41)

The promises that God made to the patriarchs beginning with Abraham begin to be fulfilled, as once again, it is the younger and not the eldest son, who is exalted to be a king.

God used this to save and preserve the entire nation of Egypt, and all the surrounding nations from seven years of severe famine. Eventually even Joseph's older brothers were brought before him. Joseph then makes a statement, which shows the supreme sovereignty of God in his rise to power, but not at the expense of human volition. He attributes his position to both the evil his brothers had intended, and to the good that God desired to do.

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” (Genesis 50:20)

God preserved both nations, Egypt and Israel, by exalting Joseph to be a king over Egypt. After many years, the favor of the Pharaohs came to an end, and they began to treat Israel with cruelty.

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.” (Exodus 1:8-9)

“Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land. Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.” (Exodus 1:10-11)

Keep in mind that these verses are recording events hundreds of years before Moses was born. In fact, the story of the birth of Moses demonstrates that Israel was oppressed in Egypt before Moses arrived on the scene. Moses only escaped the Pharaoh’s decree of death by being sent up the river in a basket. This account is found in Exodus chapter 2. It would seem from this account that the Pharaoh, who by the way, was not the same Pharaoh confronted by Moses 80 years later, had already hardened his heart towards Israel.

When we come to the portion of Exodus where God sends Moses to the Pharaoh, the Pharaohs had already been treating the Israelites with harsh cruelty for approximately 400 years. It is a common misconception that the title of Pharaoh signifies a particular individual, but the word Pharaoh simply means *an Egyptian king*. It is a title, not the proper name of an individual.

According to the majority of scholars, the Pharaoh who Moses was dealing with was Pharaoh Amenhotep II, the son of Pharaoh Thutmose III. At the time of the exodus, Moses was 80 years old, and Amenhotep II was no older than 20, and may have even been a teenager.

Possibly, the age of Amenhotep helps to explain his foolish behavior. Take the typical teenager, give him the power of an absolute dictator, and have a whole nation worship him as a god. That is what God through Moses was dealing with.

Calvinists generally ignore these facts when discussing Romans chapter nine. The statement that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart is a favorite proof text that God reprobates individuals to damnation, and prevents them from understanding or accepting the gospel, and it seems to support their position when isolated and taken out of context.

Dave Hunt, in his book *What Love is this?*, makes note of a very interesting phenomenon. He looked at the works of noted and prominent Calvinist theologians, and discovered that they unanimously began their discussion of Pharaoh’s hardening of heart in Exodus 4:21.

He noticed that Calvinists never wanted to discuss any of the historical events, and in particular Exodus 3:19, when discussing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

“Yet Calvinists are almost unanimous in their avoidance of this scripture. Passing it by, they begin their comments with Exodus 4:21”<sup>30</sup>

Hunt names White, Piper, and A.W. Pink specifically as those who totally disregard everything before Exodus 4:21.

A quick glance at the scripture index in James Whites book, *The Potters Freedom* confirms that Dave Hunt is correct. James White totally ignores everything that is said about Pharaoh and Egypt, not citing a single verse in Exodus before chapter 4 and verse 21.

So lets take a look at these facts that the Calvinist theologians do not like to discuss. First of all, Israel's bondage in Egypt had been prophesied hundreds of years before to Abraham. And in that passage, it says nothing about an individual king named Pharaoh.

“Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” (Genesis 15:13-14)

Notice that God's stated purpose here was not to *harden an individuals heart*. It would be to bring judgment upon *a nation*. And even that was not without a stated reason. It was for the specific purpose of delivering Abraham's descendants. This passage is utterly ignored by James White in *The Potters Freedom*.

Here is the next verse, which Dave Hunt singles out as being particularly ignored by Calvinists:

“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.” (Exodus 3:19)

In this verse, God speaks to Moses ahead of time, that he knows that the king of Egypt (Pharaoh Amenhotep II) will refuse to let the people of Israel go. Notice that here there is no mention of any hardening of heart, and also that this verse does not even refer to an individual, but an office, that of king of Egypt. The prophecy in Genesis 15 said that God would judge *a nation*. Obviously, if God will be sending Moses to deal with a nation, Moses will be sent to the king of that nation.

Why do Calvinist theologians totally ignore these passages? Is it because they do not know about them? No, I do not think so. I am certain that James White, for example, knows that the account in exodus exists.

In the middle of a discussion on what the word *hardened* means, James White in *The Potters Freedom* makes a startling admission, which is contrary to his overall thesis:

“Even if one did not have the obvious context of Exodus to so clearly explain that the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh was specifically related to his refusal to let the people go ... you would still have the immediate context of Romans 9 ... and of course, Paul is drawing his terminology from the Exodus account.” (emphasis added) <sup>31</sup>

In this citation White agrees with me that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not related to understanding or believing the gospel. The context in Exodus says absolutely nothing about election or reprobation to heaven or hell. Amazingly, he further argues here against his own position, and presumes that the *immediate context in Romans nine* is in harmony with *the terminology from the Exodus account!*

If the context of Romans 9:16-17 is in harmony with the context of Exodus, then Romans chapter nine is not dealing with the reprobation of individuals to hell at all. It is dealing with God's sovereignty over *nations and kings*, and specifically his sovereignty over the nation of Israel. The Apostle Paul did not cite these passages without regard for Old Testament history or Biblical precedent.

In Exodus, the first two references to God's hardening Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3) were actually prophecies that He would do it in the future. Then in the next seven references Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) before God is said to have hardened it (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8).

It is clear from the Old Testament, that the Pharaoh was not only *already hardened* towards Israel, but that this hardness had not been limited to Amenhotep II. The hardness of heart had lasted *400 years*. In Moses' dealings with him, Amenhotep is said to have hardened his own heart seven times, before it is ever said that God hardened his heart.

Furthermore, the hardening of the heart of Amenhotep had absolutely nothing to do with accepting or rejecting the gospel. Every time the Pharaoh's heart is said to be hardened, *it was in the context of not letting Israel go*, as even James White has agreed.

In fact, the Calvinist position is that those who are hardened are reprobate, and not capable of repentance. But at one point in the Biblical account, it is said that Amenhotep *did* repent:

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.” (Exodus 9:27)

While it is true that his repentance was only temporary, we have here an admission on the part of Pharaoh that he had sinned.

We see no reason in these Old Testament passages to force the concept of individual election into this verse. As we have seen, and shall continue to see, the context throughout Romans 9-11 is the election and subsequent failure of Israel.

Paul is demonstrating here that God can and does deal sovereignly over the nations. In the same way that God hardened Egypt to deliver his chosen people, he was currently hardening Israel for a similar purpose. (John 12:40, Romans 11:7, 25) For further proof see [Who does God harden?](#)

## Romans 9:19-20 (why does he still find fault?)

“You will say to me then, Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:19-20)

Scholars are in agreement that Paul is quoting from the Old Testament here, but they are divided over exactly which passage is being cited. It is agreed that it is either Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, or 64:8. John Calvin believed it was Isaiah 45:9.

There are six places in the Old Testament where the parable of the potter and the clay occur. In *every single one of them, the clay is Israel*. There are no exceptions. Nations are portrayed as vessels, but *only Israel* is portrayed as the special work of God *as the Potter*.

To see all of these verses, refer to the heading [The parable of the potter and the clay in scripture](#), later in this document.

Jeremiah 18 and 19 will be discussed when we look at the next verse in Romans, since Paul directly quotes Jeremiah 18:6 there.

A quick look at the context of each of the other ones here will demonstrate that each one of them is dealing with the *nation of Israel*, not with any other nation, and especially not with individuals.

The context of Isaiah 29:16 is the siege of Jerusalem, which is referred to as Ariel, the city of David in verse one. Verse 7 speaks of a multitude of Nations surrounding Jerusalem.

“And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night.” (Isaiah 29:7)

“You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, He did not make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?” (Isaiah 29:16)

So we see that the context of Isaiah 29:16 clearly references *Ariel (Jerusalem) and nations*, not individuals.

In Isaiah 45:9, the context clearly identifies the nation of Israel as the object being formed by God. In the beginning of the chapter, God speaks of his raising up Cyrus, the king of Persia, in order to accomplish his purpose with Israel.

“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and **Israel** my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.” (Isaiah 45:4)

An objection is raised by Israel. Why is God using a foreign king to deliver them? The answer is: God can do whatever he wishes *with Israel*.

“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, What are you making? or Your work has no handles? Woe to him who says to a **father**, What are you begetting? or to a woman, With what are you in labor?” (Isaiah 45:9-10)

“Thus says the LORD, **the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him**: Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning **my children** and the work of my hands?” (Isaiah 45:11)

Who is the *him* in verse 11? The answer is *Israel*. Notice also God being the Father in verse 10, and Israel being the children in verse 11. So we see clearly that it is not individuals being spoken of here, but Israel. What other nation in scripture can be said to have a Father-Child relationship with God?

In Isaiah 64:8, the context is the prophet recounting God’s mercy to the nation of Israel in its past history.

“I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to **the house of Israel** that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.” (Isaiah 63:7)

Next, a prayer of penitence is offered up by the prophet, in which he refers to God as the potter, and Israel as the clay.

“But now, O LORD, **you are our Father**; we are the **clay**, and you are our **potter**; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)

Notice again, as in 45:10, the reference to God as Father. The only nation that can call God *Father* in the Old Covenant is Israel (see Jeremiah 31:9).

After the devastating prophecies against Israel in Jeremiah 18 and 19, which we shall look at shortly, Jeremiah weeps over Israel in Lamentations 4:2.

“The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!” (Lamentations 4:2)

So far we have looked at every occurrence of the parable of the potter and the clay except Jeremiah 18 and 19, which we shall look at next. *Every single one of them* is speaking of God's dealings with *the nation of Israel*.

While there are passages in both Old and New Testaments in which the other nations (and also individuals) are regarded as vessels, there is not a single instance of God portrayed as a potter over the wicked nations or individuals.

Depending on the English translation, there are between 19 and 22 verses *in the entire Bible* where the word Potter appears. And *every single one of them* in which God is portrayed as a potter is describing his special relationship with the *nation of Israel*.

This indisputable fact *completely obliterates* the entire thesis of James Whites *The Potters Freedom*, in which God is portrayed as a potter of dubious character, who creates the reprobate for the sole purpose of destroying them.

So we see absolutely no support for the Calvinist interpretation that these passages quoted by Paul are teaching individual election. The only way Romans 9:19-20 can be speaking of individuals would be if the apostle Paul totally ignored Old Testament precedent, and cited out of context.

## Romans 9:21 (the potter and the clay)

“Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?” (Romans 9:21)

The first thing that we should make note of is that there are *only two vessels* being spoken of here. The Calvinist interpretation insists that the lump is all humanity, each individual person is a vessel, and they are predestined either for wrath or mercy.

If Paul had the Calvinist interpretation in mind when he wrote this, he would not have used singular terms. See [Who are the Vessels of wrath?](#) earlier in this article for more on this.

This verse is quoted from Jeremiah 18:6. When we look at Jeremiah 18 and 19, there is absolutely no doubt that it is talking about *nations*. The language is so clearly speaking of *the nation of Israel*, that even James White admits it:

“Read Jeremiah 18 and see if the point of the parable of the potter and the clay is that there is something in the clay that determines what the potter will do? The parable shows God's complete sovereignty over the nation of Israel. He can do with the nation as He wishes.”<sup>32</sup>

James White went so far as to derive the title of his book, *The Potters Freedom* on a twisted understanding of this verse in Romans, which is based entirely on projecting his own Calvinist presuppositions into the text. Yet he admits here that the passage Paul is quoting is *not* speaking about individuals, but about the *nation of Israel*.

By taking this position, White is forced by his own position here to conclude either one of two things:

1. Paul was quoting a passage *about Israel*, in order to make a point *about Israel*, which would contradict the entire thesis of *The Potters Freedom*.

-- or as White claims --

2. Jeremiah 18 *was speaking of Israel*, but when Paul quoted it, he took it *out of context* and broke with the unanimous Old Testament precedent on the analogy of the Potter and the Clay. This of course would make Paul guilty of *twisting the scriptures* (2 Peter 3:16)

If I had to make a decision who was *correctly handling the word of truth*, I would choose the Apostle here rather than White. Who would you choose?

Of course, that is not the only thing wrong with White's statement. He asks the question *is something in the clay that determines what the potter will do?* This question would lead a person to believe White has not read Jeremiah 18 carefully. Jeremiah 18 explicitly teaches contrary to Whites position.

The Potter in Jeremiah 18 states in no uncertain terms that his prior decrees of blessing upon a nation *can and will be reversed* if that nation does evil and does not listen to his voice. Likewise, a prior decree of destruction *can and will be reversed* by repentance, if the nation will turn from evil.

James White goes on at this point to argue that if God responded to Israel's repentance or sin, that this would be *the clay forcing the potters hand*.

Whites comments here demonstrate that he is so encrusted with the baggage and tradition of the reformation that he cannot accept this passage at face value. And what is worse, he boldly asserts a conclusion that is diametrically opposed to what the passage of scripture actually says. And this is from a guy who harps constantly in his book about what a *great exegete* he is.

There is absolutely no room in Whites thesis to allow for the words *I will relent* that appear in the text. In Whites mind, it is an absolute impossibility for God to relent from his prior decree in response to the actions of Israel. The passage certainly does not show the clay *forcing the potters hand*. But beyond any question, it shows God responding to Israel's condition.

Also, in verses 1-4, the potter makes a mistake and has to start over. Was this the potter's fault? Or was it the fault of the clay? There is no explanation offered by White as to how God could make a mistake so bad while working with the clay he had to start over, if there was no room for blame in the clay itself.

Is God an incompetent potter? And what potter in his right mind would destroy the majority of his work? From a business standpoint, could a company producing bowls and cups remain in business if the majority of product coming off the production line was flawed and had to be discarded? Would anyone want to invest in the stock of such a company?

These are questions that arise when a person such as James White stretches the analogy beyond its intended purpose in scripture. The analogy of the potter and the clay was intended to demonstrate one thing: God's sovereign dealings with the *nation of Israel*.

And the fact that God *will relent* of either the good or evil he had intended shows a synergistic relationship, whether James White wants to acknowledge it or not. This is what the Bible teaches. Consider how foreign statements in scripture similar to these from the book of Deuteronomy appear, when viewed through James Whites *monergistic* glasses:

“And **if you faithfully obey** the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high **above all the nations** of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 28:1)

“But **if you will not obey** the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, **then all these curses shall come upon you** and overtake you.” (Deuteronomy 28:15)

Because of these difficulties, rarely will you hear mention of Jeremiah 18 during a Calvinist discussion of Romans chapter nine. There is a very good reason for that. It is utterly devastating to the Calvinist interpretation of Romans nine to look at all of the quotations of Paul in their Old Testament context.

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words. So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And **the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand**, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.” (Jeremiah 18:1-4)

Notice the words *was spoiled in the potter's hand*. Does it say the Potter went nuts and started smashing vessels deliberately? No, it does not. It does not even say the Potter deliberately created a vessel for the purpose of smashing it. These ideas are *foreign to the Biblical text*. These are Calvinist ideas, not Jewish ideas. They were not Paul's ideas either.

“Then the word of the LORD came to me: **O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?** declares the LORD. Behold, **like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.**” (Jeremiah 18:5-6)

If at any time I declare concerning **a nation or a kingdom**, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, **I will relent** of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning **a nation or a kingdom** that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then **I will relent** of the good that I had intended to do to it. (Jeremiah 18:7-8)

As we have seen, James White readily admits that this passage is speaking of the *nation of Israel*, and not individuals. But then he presumes with no exegetical proof that Paul quotes the verse out of context and applies it to *individuals* in Romans nine.

Furthermore, the language in Romans 9:21 *does not support* the idea that the vessels are individuals. There is *one vessel* for honored use, and *another vessel* for dishonorable use. The word vessel is singular in both cases. What we have here is *two vessels*, being formed out of *one lump*.

If the vessels here were intended to represent multiple billions of individuals, there would have to be a plurality of vessels here, as in verses 22-23. In reality there are only two. See [Who are the Vessels of wrath?](#), elsewhere in this article, for more discussion of this.

In the next chapter, Jeremiah 19, we have another instance of the analogy of the Potter and clay. It is actually a continuation of chapter 18. Here we see that *Israel*, and Jerusalem in particular, is the vessel which is broken. The vessel being broken is a symbol of God's judgment upon the sinful nation.

“Thus says the LORD, "Go, [buy a potter's earthenware flask](#), and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you.” (Jeremiah 19:1-2)

“Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: [So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel](#), so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.” (Jeremiah 19:10-11)

Here we have the answer to the question [Who are the Vessels of wrath?](#) spelled out very clearly. Should we consider it surprising that there is *not a single word* spoken about these verses in *The Potters Freedom?*

### **Romans 9:22-23 (vessels of wrath, vessels of mercy)**

“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory” (Romans 9:22-23)

In a continuation of the discussion of the potter and the clay, the focus now shifts to the vessels, and their destiny. The Calvinist insists that the vessels are individual men, in spite of these facts:

1. The language *endured with much patience* is clearly referring to Israel and can be seen in many N.T. passages (Matthew 23:37, Romans 10:21)
2. In verse 21 the language is the singular *one vessel*.
3. The context of the chapter as a whole is *nations*.
4. The context of *all* the Old Testament passages quoted is *nations*.
5. There is both Old and New Testament precedent for the imagery of the breaking of vessels used to describe the wrath of God upon nations.

The words *endured with much patience* should be understood in light of the context:

“But of Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” (Romans 10:21)

So we see that God endured Israel with patience, in order to demonstrate his mercy to all (Romans 11:32). The vessels of wrath should be understood in light of this, and Biblical precedent concerning the object of the prophecies which use this terminology, *namely Israel*.

The following verses show the Biblical precedent, that the breaking of vessels speaks of the destruction of nations (usually Israel):

“Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant; and **its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel that is smashed** so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a shard is found with which to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern.” (Isaiah 30:12-14)

“Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: **So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel**, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.” (Jeremiah 19:10-11)

“On all the housetops of Moab and in the squares there is nothing but lamentation, for **I have broken Moab like a vessel for which no one cares**, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 48:38)

“Ask of me, and I will make **the nations** your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and **dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel**.” (Psalm 2:8-9)

“**Israel** is swallowed up; already they are **among the nations as a useless vessel**.” (Hosea 8:8)

“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over **the nations**, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when **earthen pots are broken in pieces**, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. (Revelation 2:26-27)

So we see precedent in scripture for the vessels referring to nations. That the word *vessel* is singular in verse 21 shows that the *one lump* that the Potter began with *was Israel*. The *two vessels* represent the *faithful remnant* and *unbelieving Israel*.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul then switches to the plural usage of the words. This opens up the possibility in his reasoning to introduce the idea that Gentiles can also be grafted in where the unbelieving Jews had been cut off.

We see the identical truth taught in chapter 11, where the parable of the vine is used. Just as there is *one lump* in Romans 9:21, there is only *one vine*. The passage in chapter 11 begins in verse 16:

“If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole **lump**, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” (Romans 11:16)

The firstfruits refer to Abraham and the Patriarchs according to the majority of commentators. The Greek word for *lump* in Romans 11:16 is the *same word* used for *one lump* in Romans 9:21.

In both passages, there is *one lump*. In Romans 11:16 the analogy is extended into that of a vine. The *lump* of Romans 9:21 and Romans 11:16 is the same as the *root* in Romans 11:16. Along with the parable of the vine is also introduced the idea of branches. The branches clearly have to represent *individuals*. Because multiple branches are cut off, and because Israel is the vine, this is the only way to understand it. The *unbelieving branches* were broken off, and faithful branches from a Gentile vine *are grafted in to replace them*.

“But if **some of the branches were broken off**, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of **the olive tree**” (Romans 11:17)

Notice that even when the idea of individuals is introduced in chapter 11, they are still connected to *one vine*. There are not billions of *individual vines* spoken of, and neither are there billions of individual vessels in Romans nine.

The language in Romans 9:22-24 shifts from the singular in verse 21, and speaks of a plurality of vessels, both from the Jews and the Gentiles. We should understand this plurality of vessels in the light of Chapter eleven where the idea is more fully developed, as a plurality of branches.

Since Israel as a nation can only be understood as singular, we clearly have a transition to a discussion of *individuals* starting in verse 22. In contrast, the *singular* vessels of verse 21 were clearly dealing with a division of Israel, as we discussed earlier.

So at this point in Romans nine, Paul is ready to introduce the idea that salvation is available to *all individuals*, including the Gentiles.

In addition to the parable of the vine and the branches in Romans eleven, we also have a discussion of this in Ephesians chapter two:

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands- remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:11-12)

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who **has made us both one** and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:13-14)

“by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might **create in himself one new man in place of the two**, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:15-16)

We see clearly here that in the Apostle’s mind, the Jew and Gentile were *two* made into *one new man*. The Gentiles were grafted into the place where unbelieving Israel had been cut off. (Romans 11:19-20)

Now that we have established the correct interpretation of verses 20-24, we have *eliminated* all of the errors of extreme Calvinism from the passage. The Potter only deals with *Israel as a nation*. He does not create vessels for the sole purpose of destruction.

For further proof of this from the Greek, see Phil Schaff’s comments under the heading: [Vessels fitted for destruction](#) later in this article. Here it is proven that the Greek language *does not* support the belief that the vessels of wrath were created *for that purpose*.

### **Romans 9:24 (both Jews and Gentiles are elect now)**

“even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?”  
(Romans 9:24)

At this point, A.T. Robertson’s comments are helpful:

“But also from the Gentiles. Paul had already alluded to this fact in 9:6f. (cf. Ga 3:7-9). Now he proceeds to prove it from the Old Testament.”<sup>33</sup>

Paul’s words in Galatians 3:7-9 is an excellent summary of this verse:

“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, **foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:7-9)

Here Paul introduces the second great truth of the passage. The first was that Israel was being hardened and cut off, and only a remnant would be saved. The second is that *Gentiles* will be saved *in their place*.

## Romans 9:25-29 (Old Testament proof)

“As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people I will call my people, and her who was not beloved I will call beloved. 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.” (Romans 9:25-26)

Cited from Hosea 2:23, and 1:10. These verses are clearly speaking of the election of the gentile nations into the kingdom promises.

“And Isaiah cries out concerning **Israel**: Though the number of the sons of **Israel** be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay. And as Isaiah predicted, If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.” (Romans 9:27-29)

Cited from Isaiah 10:22-23, Hosea 1:10, and Isaiah 1:9. These verses are clearly speaking of the fact that only a remnant of the nation of Israel would be saved.

Here is the Old Testament proof of the two great truths of the passage. As we discussed earlier, Paul uses more Old Testament quotations in this chapter than any other. Clearly his demonstration that the prophets had foretold all of these things was intended to instruct and answer Jewish objections.

## Romans 9:30-33 (Final conclusion)

“What shall we say, then? That **Gentiles** who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that **Israel** who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.” (Romans 9:30-31)

“Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and **whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.**” (Romans 9:32-33)

Cited from Isaiah 8:14, which refers to Jerusalem, not individuals, and Isaiah 28:16.

The Conclusion speaks for itself. Any interpretation of Romans nine that does not speak of the things in this conclusion are to be rejected as out of context. As we have demonstrated, Calvinist interpretations draw conclusions totally different than the conclusion of Paul here.

## Calvinist interpretations demolished

### Ten Biblical reasons why God did not hate Esau

It is not possible for Jacob and Esau in Romans 9 to be speaking of Individuals. The following Biblical facts completely invalidate the theory that *God hated Esau as an individual*.

1. The book of Malachi was written *over 1500 years* after Jacob and Esau had died, and the reference is clearly *looking back* to the *nations* of Israel and Edom.
2. The language in this passage (Malachi 1:1-3) is all in the *past tense*. I *have* loved, I *have* hated, I *have* laid waste. These verses are speaking of *past* events. They clearly are *not* speaking of the unconditional election and reprobation of individuals before they were born.
3. The prophecy *The older will serve the younger*, which was spoken before the children were born, also called them *two nations* before they were born. (Genesis 25:23)
4. The context in Genesis also shows a plural *two peoples*, the one who shall be stronger than the other. (Genesis 25:23)
5. The prophecy *The older will serve the younger* was never fulfilled within the lifetime of the individuals, in fact the opposite was true. So this *must* be interpreted as a prophecy that concerned the descendants of the children, Israel and Edom. (see Genesis 33)
6. The prophecy *The one shall be stronger than other* was never fulfilled within the lifetime of the individuals, in fact the opposite was true. So this *must* be interpreted as a prophecy that concerned the descendants of the children, Israel and Edom. (see Genesis 33)
7. Because the book of Malachi is looking back upon the nations of Israel and Edom, the saying *Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated* was not referring to the individuals, but speaking by figure metonymy of the *nations* of Israel and Edom. In fact, the prophecy in Malachi is addressed to Israel, not Jacob (Malachi 1:1)
8. Jacob and Esau are *not* introduced as a new idea in Romans nine. They are brought up as a *continuation* of the argument. In Romans 9:10, the words, *and not only so* connect the two examples to the same line of reasoning. If the argument was *God hated Esau*, then there would also have to be support in scripture that *God hated Ishmael* as well ... but there is none. In fact, the scripture states that God promised to make Ishmael a great nation (Genesis 21:18), God was with Ishmael (Genesis 21:20) and twice says God had heard the voice of Ishmael (Genesis 21:17)
9. If the Calvinist reasoning were extended *forward* a generation, the Calvinist would have to conclude that *God hated all of Joseph's older brothers*, since he chose to raise up their younger brother Joseph to the highest position in all the land of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. Did God hate the other eleven? If so, then he hated the majority of Israel.
10. The Calvinist reasoning, if extended to yet another generation to include the two sons of Joseph, would force us to a similar conclusion. To be consistent, since the older Manasseh was in an identical manner passed over for the blessing, as Ishmael and Esau were (Genesis 48:19), the Calvinist *must* conclude that *God hated Manasseh* too. But again, there is no Biblical support for such a conclusion. In fact, the same verse that shows God choosing Ephraim (Genesis 48:19) shows a blessing upon both of the boys.

In addition to these Biblical facts, Even John Calvin admits that Romans 9:13 is not speaking of the two individuals (see Calvin's commentary, Rom 9:12-13). The hating of Esau as an individual is clearly not the point being made in Romans 9:13.

## The parable of the potter and the clay in scripture

All of the places in scripture where the parable of the potter and the clay are found. In every one of them, the clay is Israel.

**Isaiah 29:16** You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, He did not make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?

**Isaiah 45:9** Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, What are you making? or Your work has no handles?

**Isaiah 64:8** But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

**Jeremiah 18:6** O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

**Jeremiah 19:11** and shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.

**Lamentations 4:2** The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!

**Romans 9:20** But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, Why have you made me like this?

**Romans 9:21** Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?

As can be easily seen by studying the context of each of these passages, there is absolutely no support in Old Testament usage of the parable of the potter and the clay for the Calvinist interpretation that it speaks of individuals.

There is not a shred of Biblical precedent to support the Calvinist interpretation.

## Vessels fitted for destruction (Phil Schaff)

Phil Schaff explains here why the Calvinist belief that God deliberately hardens the *vessels of wrath* so that they cannot believe is not supported in the text of Romans nine:

There can be no doubt that Paul teaches an eternal election to eternal salvation by free grace, an election which is to be actualized by faith in Christ and a holy life of obedience. But he does not teach a decree of reprobation or a predestination to sin and perdition (which would indeed be a "*decretum horribile*," if *verum*). This is a logical invention of supralapsarian theologians who deem it to be the necessary counterpart of the decree of election. But man's logic is not God's logic. A decree of reprobation is nowhere mentioned. The term ἀδόκιμος, *disapproved, worthless, reprobate*, is used five times only as a description of character (twice of things). Romans 9 is the Gibraltar of supralapsarianism, but it must be explained in connection with Rom. 10–11, which present the other aspects. The strongest passage is Rom. 9:22, where Paul speaks of σκεύη ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν. But he significantly uses here the passive: "*fitted* unto destruction," or rather (as many of the best commentators from Chrysostom to Weiss take it) the middle: "*who fitted themselves* for destruction," and so deserved it; while of the vessels of mercy he says that God "*before prepared*" them unto glory (σκεύη ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν). He studiously avoids to say of the vessels of wrath: ἃ κατήρτισεν which would have corresponded to ο ἃ προητοίμασεν, and thus he exempts God from a direct and efficient agency in sin and destruction. When in 9:17, he says of Pharaoh, that God *raised him up* for the very purpose (εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐξήγειρά σε) that he might show in him His power, he does not mean that God created him or called him into existence (which would require a different verb), but, according to the Hebrew (Ex. 9:16, the hiphil of עָמַד), that "he caused him to stand forth" as actor in the scene; and when he says with reference to the same history that God "hardens whom he will" (Rom. 9:18. ὃν δὲ θέλει σκληρύνει), it must be remembered that Pharaoh had already repeatedly hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34, 35), so that God punished him for his sin and abandoned him to its consequences. God does not cause evil, but he bends, guides, and overrules it and often punishes sin with sin. "*Das ist der Fluch der bösen That, dass sie, fortzeugend, immer Böses muss gebären.*" (Schiller.)<sup>34</sup>

**All the individuals named in Romans nine**

<b>Individual name</b>	<b>National name</b>	<b>Name Changed</b>	<b>National promise</b>
Abram	Abraham	Genesis 17:5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.	Genesis 18:18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? (Also 17:5)
Ishmael	Ishmaelites		Genesis 17:20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.
Isaac			Genesis 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.
Jacob	Israel	Genesis 32:28 Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.	Genesis 25:23 And the LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.
Esau	Edom	Genesis 25:30 And Esau said to Jacob, Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted! Therefore his name was called Edom. (Also Genesis 36:1,8)	Genesis 25:23 And the LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.
Moses			Exodus 32:10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you. (Moses chose to decline the offer)
Amenhotep II	Pharaoh		Exodus 9:16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

## Footnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 205
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 196
- <sup>3</sup> Sproul, R. C. (1996, c1986). *Chosen by God, Chapter 7: Romans 9*
- <sup>4</sup> Matt Slick, *The Calvinist Corner website*, (1998, 1999, 2000),  
<http://www.mslick.com/romans9.htm>
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 213
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 205
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 221
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 196
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 205
- <sup>11</sup> Matt Slick, *The Calvinist Corner website*, (1998, 1999, 2000),  
<http://www.mslick.com/romans9.htm>
- <sup>12</sup> Sproul, R. C. (1996, c1986). *Chosen by God, Chapter 7: Romans 9*
- <sup>13</sup> MacArthur, J. (1996, c1991, c1994). *Romans (Ro 9:14)*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- <sup>14</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 213-214
- <sup>15</sup> Hodge, C. (1997). *Systematic theology*. Originally published 1872. (Vol. 2, Page 318).
- <sup>16</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 213
- <sup>17</sup> Calvin, John, *Commentary on Romans 9:6*
- <sup>18</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 206
- <sup>19</sup> Calvin, John, *Commentary on Romans 9:4*
- <sup>20</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 217
- <sup>21</sup> Norman Geisler (1999, 2001). *Chosen but free*, second edition, 84
- <sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xxi, 6-7
- <sup>23</sup> MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible (Ro 9:13)*
- <sup>24</sup> Dr. James White (Copyright 2003 Alpha and Omega Ministries),  
*Does the Bible Teach Predestination? An Exegetical Debate*,  
<http://www.aomin.org/JWDB1.html>
- <sup>25</sup> *Oxford English dictionary*, (2002) Oxford University press
- <sup>26</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary*, (1992) Houghton Mifflin
- <sup>27</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 222
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 210
- <sup>29</sup> MacArthur, J. (1996, c1991, c1994). *Romans (Ro 9:14)*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- <sup>30</sup> Dave Hunt, (2002), *What Love is this?*, 267
- <sup>31</sup> James R. White (2000), *The Potters Freedom*, 221-222
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 225
- <sup>33</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word pictures in the New Testament*, (Romans 9:24)
- <sup>34</sup> Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian church*. I, XI, 71