

BIBLE STUDY ROMANS 9

Romans 9:1–13

	<u><i>Romans 8</i></u>	<u><i>Romans 9</i></u>
<u><i>Adoption/Sonship</i></u>	<u><i>verse 15</i></u>	<u><i>verses 4, 26</i></u>
<u><i>Glory</i></u>	<u><i>verses 18, 21</i></u>	<u><i>verses 4, 23</i></u>
<u><i>Purpose of God</i></u>	<u><i>verse 29</i></u>	<u><i>verse 11</i></u>
<u><i>Foreknowledge/Election</i></u>	<u><i>verse 29</i></u>	<u><i>verse 11</i></u>
<u><i>God's Children</i></u>	<u><i>verses 14, 16</i></u>	<u><i>verse 8</i></u>
<u><i>Calling of God</i></u>	<u><i>verses 28, 30</i></u>	<u><i>verses 12, 24</i></u>
<u><i>Cut off/Separation from God</i></u>	<u><i>verse 29</i></u>	<u><i>verses 22, 28, 29</i></u>

Paul has covered a huge amount of material in these first eight chapters. From a rhetorical standpoint, it seems as if he is siding with the Gentiles against the Jews as he makes his various points about the gospel.

In [Romans 2:17–23](#), he claims that circumcision and knowledge of the law do not exempt a person from God's judgment. In fact, boasting in such things while breaking the law blasphemes God's name. In [2:28](#) he makes clear that the internal, not the external, is what matters. This leads to the question in [3:1](#) of whether there is any advantage or value in being a Jew. Paul answers yes, but provides only one reason.

Even so, Paul is not taking sides; he is correcting misconceptions about the gospel. Much of his effort thus far has been focused on *Jewish* misconceptions of the gospel. Jews are just as much under God's wrath as the heathens described in [Romans 1:18–32](#). Law-keeping and circumcision do not replace faith as the basis of salvation. Paul presents Abraham's experience as a test case in [4:1–23](#), and drives home his point that salvation has always been based on faith, not works of the law.

Understanding the role of faith would not only affect Jewish understanding of salvation, but also their regard for the Gentiles and their salvation. If, indeed, a righteousness from God has been revealed apart from the law, and this righteousness is given through faith,

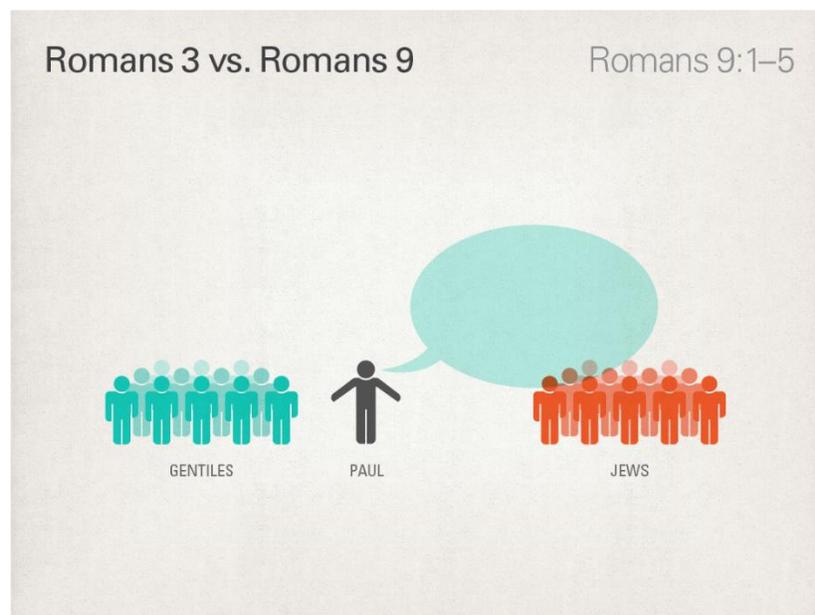


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it changes everything—the role of law-keeping for the Jew as well as the burden of law-keeping for Gentile believers.

In [Romans 3:27](#), Paul summarizes the consequences of this newly revealed righteousness by faith: No longer is there any room for boasting in the law or one's covenant status with God. Faith in Christ's atoning work on the cross is the only basis for salvation.

This sense of Paul taking sides is a natural consequence of his task thus far—dismantling any possible Jewish argument for considering themselves better than the “Gentile sinners” (see [Gal 2:15](#)). He wants the self-confident Jews to reconsider that in which they have placed their trust—the law—in light of this righteousness from God that has been revealed through Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul's argument would likely have shaken their beliefs to the very core, leading them to question much of what they believed to be true.



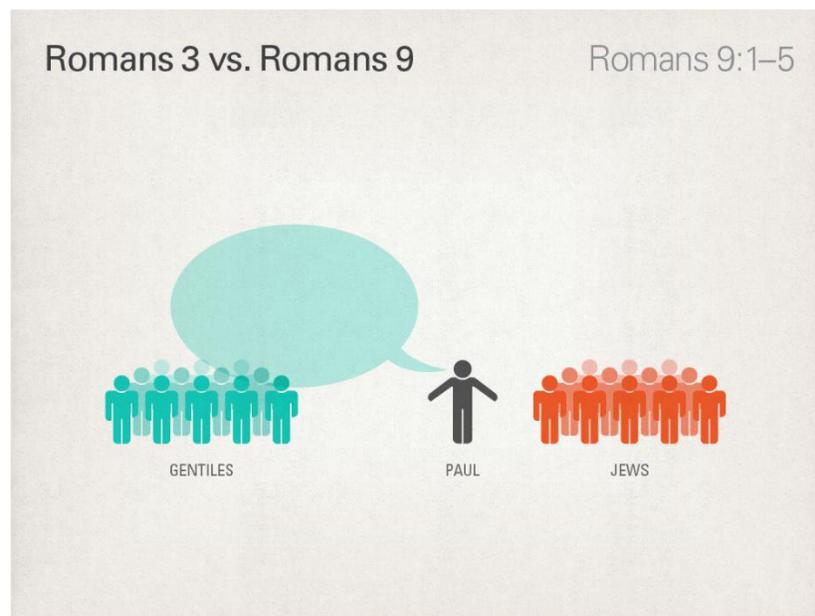
Romans 3 vs. Romans 9: Based on the nature of Paul's argument thus far, it seems as if he were talking primarily to the Jews, addressing misconceptions about the gospel, law, and the Gentiles. It almost seems like he has been siding with the Gentiles.

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If anyone is keeping score, it might seem that Paul has been playing on the Gentile side and that all the points are in their column. But Paul has focused his attention on the Jews, not because he is against them, but because he is *not* playing favorites. He is pursuing some very specific goals:

first, to demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubt that Jews and Gentiles are in the same predicament when it comes to sin, wrath, and judgment; and second, to explain that there is only one plan for reconciliation with God, salvation through faith. Contrary to popular Jewish belief, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; both share the same problem and the same solution.

As Paul heads deeper into chapter 9, he shifts gears to address some of the remaining implications of this "salvation by faith" gospel.



Romans 3 vs. Romans 9: Paul's argument thus far has primarily addressed Jewish misconceptions about the gospel. But Paul is neither anti-Jew nor anti-Gentile. He has not taken sides, but he instead stands against misconceptions of the gospel. In the next section, he begins to address Gentile misconceptions about the gospel and its implications for Israel's status before God. The tables are about to turn.

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Notice how Paul recharacterizes the Jews as “his brothers and his fellow countrymen according to the flesh who are Israelites.” No longer is he portraying them as potential blasphemers of God’s name (2:24) or rebels whose throats are like open graves (see 3:10–18). Paul uses these impassioned words to express the grief and distress he feels regarding the plight of his people (9:1–2), then he immediately cites the unique privileges they enjoy. Contrast the list in 9:3–5 with the one-item “list” of 3:1 following Paul’s “much in every way” statement. The contrast here is not an oversight by Paul, but an intentional rhetorical strategy.

As he writes each section, Paul has specific motivations and objectives in mind.

In **Romans 3** he acknowledged advantages to being Jewish, but listing those advantages would have been counterproductive. His purpose was to help his Jewish audience understand that they have the very same need for the gospel as the Gentiles. In **Romans 9** Paul prepares to address a problematic issue: God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises. If there is really is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, then what does the Jews’ covenant status with God matter in the big scheme of things?

Romans 3 vs. Romans 9

Romans 9:3–5

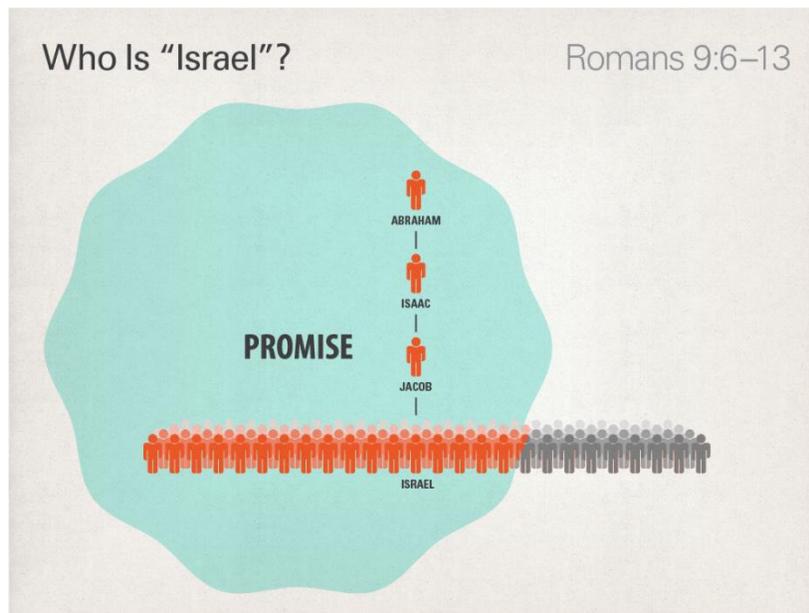
- 1 Adoption
- 2 The Glory
- 3 The Covenants
- 4 The Law
- 5 The Temple Services
- 6 The Promises
- 7 The Patriarchs
- 8 The Lineage of Christ

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Romans 3 vs. Romans 9: In response to the rhetorical question about advantages enjoyed by Jews in **3:1**, Paul names only one thing. Although he acts as if he will list more, he stops at one. Now in **Romans 9**, as he is addressing Gentile misconceptions about the gospel, Paul provides the kind of list the Jews expected to hear back in **Romans 3**. The lists differ according to Paul's rhetorical goals for each context.

Paul's lengthy list of advantages in [9:4-5](#) gives his audience the impression that he could go on indefinitely. But he makes a somber shift in verse [6](#), one we can anticipate based on his statement in verses [2-3](#): He grieves and is greatly distressed for his fellow Israelites and would wish himself accursed on their behalf. But why? [We must think back to Romans 4.](#)

As Paul described Abraham's faith-based acquisition of righteousness, he introduced the notion that not all of Abraham's descendants partake in the righteousness he obtained. Although God's promise is available to all of Abraham's descendants, only those who respond in faith actually acquire it—even if they are not his *physical* descendants (4:13-16). Paul first raised and partially addressed the issue regarding Abraham's true descendants back in 4:14; he picks it up again here in 9:6.



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Who Is “Israel”? In **Romans 9:6–8** Paul restates this information three ways to clarify how he defines the people of God according to God’s promises to the patriarchs. In the following verses he provides numerous Old Testament quotations to support his assertion that not every physical descendant of Abraham is a member of “Israel,” as reckoned by the promise.

Paul’s claim that Abraham’s real descendants are reckoned by faith and not by lineage has significant implications. It defines the people of God by something other than national lines. Since not all of Israel has believed with the faith of Abraham, in Paul’s view, the nation itself cannot be equated with the people of God. We saw this already in [4:14](#), where physical lineage was not the determining factor for obtaining righteousness.

If it had been, then faith and the promises of God would have been rendered null and void.

But those who respond in faith, even though they are not physical descendants, are still counted as Abraham’s heirs according to faith. They have membership in the people of God because of their faith, not circumcision or national lineage.

But there is another side to consider—those who are physical descendants of Abraham but do not respond to the gospel in faith. How should we regard God’s covenant faithfulness to these non-believing descendants? These people are part of Israel, but are they part of the people of God? Have God’s promises somehow failed? Paul asks this question in [9:6](#) to introduce his main theme for the next three chapters. His answer lies in understanding the important distinction between the nation of Israel and the people of God.

Paul’s initial answer restates the same basic message three ways in verses [6–8](#) to make sure that no one misses his point.

- [Romans 9:6b](#): “Israel” ≠ all Israel



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- [Romans 9:7](#): Abraham's children ≠ all Abraham's descendants (e.g., Isaac not Ishmael)
- [Romans 9:8](#): children of God ≠ children of the flesh; rather, children of God = children of the promise

The Greek grammar here is difficult to render clearly in English. Each of the statements presupposes the existence of an Israel, descendants of Abraham, and children of God. The question is who, exactly, composes each group? Paul provides an answer with each statement—and these claims are not what we might think. Adopting and retaining this view of Israel is the key to understanding Paul's entire argument of [Romans 9–11](#).

Romans 9:14–29

The question of whether God has failed to honor His promises to Israel serves as the big idea for this section of Romans. Paul tackles it in smaller bits, beginning with defining who Israel is. Instead of answering the question of God's faithfulness with a yes or no, he reframes the question in [9:6b–8](#) with the three identifications of Israel—as something other than the genealogical descendants of Abraham. Paul is not talking about God saving the nation of Israel, but His own people who have responded in faith.

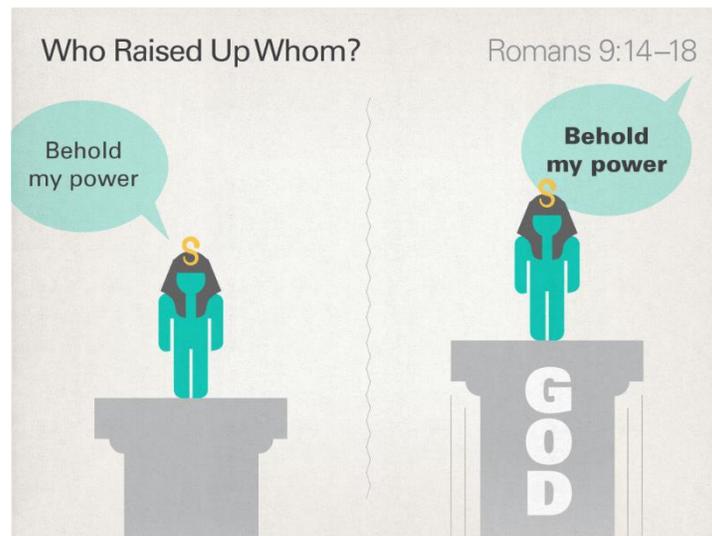
His contention is this: Our perspective on God's covenant faithfulness will change if we truly understand "Israel" as God does. In the remainder of [9:9–13](#), Paul presents attestations of the same principles from the Old Testament. Biblical history consistently demonstrates a winnowing down of the patriarchal line: Isaac was chosen rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Esau.

Paul returns to his main argument in verse [14](#), addressing two implications stemming from the idea of God's sovereign activity. Is God just, if He chooses some and not others? Consider it this way: If His choice brings about a foreordained result before I can be involved, is that fair and just? Paul answers "No way!" and then supports it by quoting [Exodus 33:19](#) about God's sovereignty. Paul now has the groundwork to draw out a logical

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consequence in verse [16](#). **God's choice is a matter of Him showing us mercy, not a matter of our wants or actions.**

We have a tendency to view God from one of two perspectives. In the first, we might see Him as the loving God who cared enough to send His only Son to die for us, with whom we can have a close and intimate relationship. His love for us is indeed unfathomable, and His knowledge of us is incomparable. After all, He specifically created us for His special purposes, which means we *are* special, right? All of this is true, but it's *our* perspective. The corollary—God's perspective—is that He specifically created us for *His* special purposes.



Who Raised Up Whom? God's plans result from both human agents making decisions and God's divine prerogative to accomplish His purposes. As creator, He has sovereign authority to do as He wishes. Thus, while Pharaoh made decisions about releasing Israel from slavery, God's hand was at work, demonstrating His power through Pharaoh.

Paul highlights this point in verse [17](#) by mentioning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart during Israel's exodus from Egypt. We take comfort in God's love and His plans for us—until His purposes are at odds with ours. God raised up Pharaoh only to harden his heart—in order that His name would be proclaimed in all the earth. He might have used any number of other means to accomplish this outcome, but He sovereignly chose hardening

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Pharaoh's heart. God's divine prerogative is not made in consultation with others. He ordains things in such a way to ensure His plan comes about.

God knew Pharaoh intimately and created him especially for His purposes—just as much as you or me. Still, it seems unfair that God would harden someone to accomplish His purposes; after all, He could just as easily harden me. But this is precisely Paul's point (see [Rom 11:22](#)). God is God and we are not. In His infinite wisdom, His purposes and intentions take precedence over ours; there is no room for discussion.

If we neglect God's sovereignty to accomplish His purposes, we can think more highly of ourselves than we ought. God loves us and has a plan for our lives, but we do not have control over that plan. We must never forget who is in charge (it's not us). Paul is driving home the lesson that to have a proper view of God, we must hold these two perspectives in tandem. It is a biblical reality, but not the whole picture.

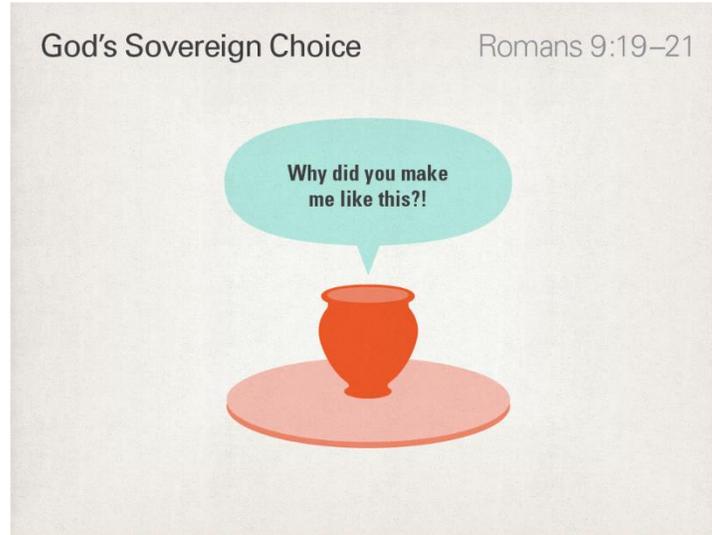
At the same time, in an elusive and non-contradictory way, we do have a choice in how we respond to God.

Paul addresses this issue elsewhere in Romans—when God reveals His wrath against those who have rejected Him ([1:18–21](#)), when a person passes judgment on others ([2:1–4](#)), when some of Israel rejects the gospel ([11:14–15](#)). Paul will not let us overlook the role of human responsibility. Because we are culpable for our actions, God is just in holding us accountable for our sin ([6:23](#)), despite the factor of divine sovereignty.

But Paul raises an additional question in [9:19](#). Most of us tend to have this general notion of cosmic justice in which all of us are repaid according to our own actions. Yet we have no control over countless factors that affect our lives, such as the circumstances into which we are born. But Paul goes well beyond this general kind of sovereign decision to God actively, divinely intervening in someone's life—directing someone's will with His own. If God is making decisions that are beyond my control, then why am I accountable for them?



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God's Sovereign Choice: Paul uses the illustration of the pottery questioning the potter's design decisions to highlight the folly of questioning God's divine prerogative. Just as the potter has authority over the clay to do as he sees fit, so too does God shape us to be most useful to Him.

This logical question is essentially sidestepped by turning the table on the questioner. Paul poses rhetorical questions in verse [19](#) and responds with another series in verse [20](#). These questions form a subsection within [9:14-29](#). Paul give us another dose of "divine sovereignty"—a reminder that we are not in control. God's purposes supersede ours ([9:21](#)), but there is far more to it.

Paul introduces what might sound like a hypothetical scenario in verse [22](#), but it actually provides a thumbnail view of God's decision-making. It presupposes that part of God's creation incurred His wrath.

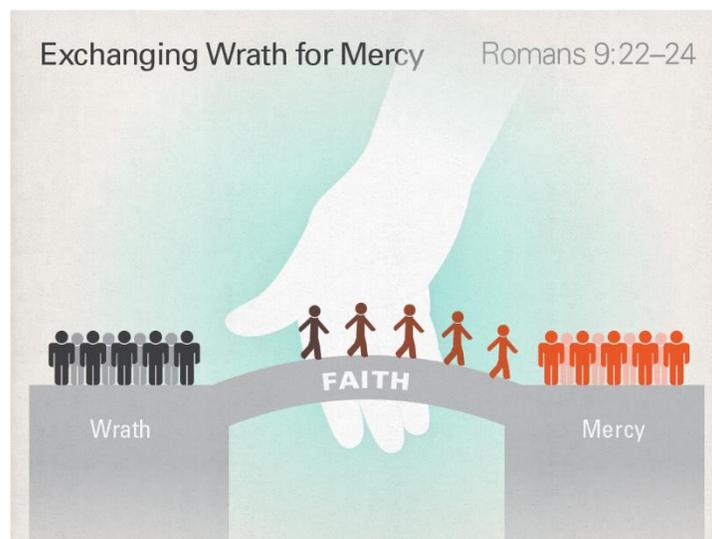
We know from [Romans 1-3](#) that all of us have sinned, leading to God's wrath against our rebellion. God would have been completely justified in executing judgment against us, **but that is not what He chose to do. Instead, He allowed a larger purpose—the desire to make His power known—to supersede a demonstration of His wrath.** Revealing His power demanded a

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higher degree of patience with the “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” than just wiping us out.

This delayed judgment on our wrath-deserving sin was already mentioned in Romans 3:25–26, where, in His forbearance, God passed over our previously committed sins. Recall that the passing over is not a sweeping under the rug—otherwise God could not be both just and justifier (3:26). Paul mentions both of these themes in 9:22 as well, demonstrating God’s wrath and making known His power. God’s wrath must still be addressed, but He has delayed it out of a desire to make His power known. Note that this is the very same desire that led Him to harden Pharaoh’s heart (9:17).

So what was God’s motive for patiently enduring vessels of wrath like us, vessels prepared beforehand for destruction? Paul says it was something more than just His desire to demonstrate His power. In [9:23](#), Paul says that His power is manifested by making known the riches of His glory to these vessels—and note the change in how the vessels are characterized. No longer are they full of wrath and destined for destruction; now they are vessels of mercy He had prepared beforehand for His glory. This idea of being “prepared beforehand” links back to God’s larger plan and the notion of election. And lest we mistakenly think that Paul has only Jewish believers in mind, he clarifies **in 9:24 that God’s plan also includes Gentiles. Once again we see that we cannot equate the nation of Israel with the people of God. For Paul, the people of God are determined by their response in faith, not their lineage.**



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Exchanging Wrath for Mercy: Immediately after affirming God’s divine right to do as He sees fit with humanity, Paul introduces a hypothetical situation that describes what God actually did. Rather than leaving us to face destruction, He patiently bore with our sin and provided His own righteousness to all who would believe.

Knowing the inclusion of the Gentiles is unexpected, Paul counters with quotations from Hosea, where those who were not called God’s people and were not loved by Him experience a reversal on both counts.

The original context of Hosea focused on restoration for those who had walked away. Here in Romans, Paul adds another layer of restoration—the inclusion of Gentile believers, those outside of Israel, among the children of the living God (9:26). Paul affirms once again that God’s people cannot be identified by nationality, but only by a response of faith.

In 9:27 Paul narrows the scope back down to Israel. He shifts analogies from the restoration of those who have fallen away to the concept of a preserved remnant within Israel. Nevertheless, he promotes the notion of an intentionally selected group from within a larger group. God could have chosen to preserve all, to restore all, but He chooses to restore only the remnant.

These quotations from Hosea reinforce Paul’s initial premise of this chapter—***that real “Israel” and the ethnic Israel are not identical. Rather, the real Israel—the true people of God—consists of a believing subgroup of the nation in addition to the believing Gentiles. Paul used this same kind of delineation in Romans 4:11–12 to describe Abraham’s true descendants.*** Paul repeats these analogies to explain that it was never God’s intention for His chosen and redeemed people to include every descendent of Abraham.

The apostle’s main point is to rebut the concept that Israel rejected the gospel because God’s promises to them had somehow failed. ***He demonstrates that this line of thinking represents a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s plan of***



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salvation, which was never exclusively for Israel, whether in whole or in part. Rather, the nation of Israel was the means by which God's blessings were to extend beyond them to all nations. God's plan of salvation includes all of creation, not just His chosen people (see Rom 8:18–23).

The inclusiveness of the gospel has huge implications—there is no room for claiming that Jewish law-keeping is a prerequisite for belief in the Messiah.

The second, likely shocking point of this section is contained in the first. Paul has just reminded his Jewish audience that the people of God include believing Gentiles. Here he makes explicit that the salvation of Israel never entailed the entire nation. The many Old Testament references to the preservation of a remnant align with Paul's description of God's purposes according to election ([9:11](#)). Not every physical descendant of Abraham is elect; God's purposes dictate who is hardened and who is shown mercy ([9:16](#)). Paul makes no apologies here. God is the one who created us for His own purposes and designs, and we owe our entire existence to Him, period ([9:21](#)). God's unique position of Creator brings with it a divine prerogative to accomplish His purposes with His creation. As His creation, our role is to trust, not to like or dislike His plans.

But lest we conclude God is whimsical or manipulative, Paul reframes his argument again: God's offer of salvation requires **His patient endurance of our sin and our well-deserved punishment in order to demonstrate His wrath and power (9:22). This plan enables Him make known the riches of His glory to us—the vessels He created beforehand.** The course of human history—from the first sin, our rejection of God, living in slavery to sin—are all part of His larger plan, not only for Israel, but for all people of the world ([9:25–29](#)).

