

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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### Romans 9:14-18

#### Study Notes

**The Prior Question:** “Did God's Word fail with regard to Israel?” Not at all ... because not all contemporary Israel is, in fact, true Israel. There are two Israel(s). One is by birth alone; the other is spiritual Israel.

A reversal of Sons: Ishmael and Isaac; Esau and Jacob. Out of all the children born to the twelve tribes, only a remnant would represent the true Israel.

- **The Next Question:** “Is God unjust?”

**Paul's goal:** To bring us to a very critical understanding of God's dealings with Israel and the Church. God's purposes for the nation of Israel have been fulfilled in a newly created people God calls “the Church”.

**Verses 15-16:** *“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*

This is not a passage about individual election: Both of the Old Testament references Paul cites are taken from a corporate experience, as opposed to an individual experience.

The First Quote: Israel's corporate future after the idolatry at Mt. Sinai, recorded in Exodus 33.

The Israelites convinced Aaron to make a golden calf to carry before them as they head back to Egypt. At first, God seems resolved to destroy all of them. Eventually, Moses asks to see God's Glory.

God's statement: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

Paul's second quote: It actually came before the first one. It's taken from the Exodus account. Verses 16-17:

“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

The context: Exodus 9 – where God is telling Moses what will happen to Israel during this contest between God and Pharaoh. It is also a statement about what will happen to Pharaoh – as he keeps hardening his heart after God removes each plague.

Both quotes deal with the nation of Israel. That’s the true context. Paul is continuing his discussion about the eight benefits Israel possessed as a covenant nation. It has nothing to do with individual salvation.

- **An Important Question:** “If Paul is explaining the condition of the nation, why does he talk about Moses and Pharaoh?”

1. The first example: Paul is explaining how Israel missed her own Messiah. He also expresses the lostness of Israel which prompted the question, “Has God’s word failed?” (v. 6).

God’s people – freshly delivered from Egyptian bondage – and situated at the foot of Mt. Sinai are ready to follow an Egyptian Idol right back into bondage.

2. The second example: Pharaoh’s hardening explains Israel’s hardening. Paul illustrates how God allowed Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened while he showed Mercy to Moses.

Here’s the question: “Did Pharaoh harden his own heart, or did God harden it?” The answer is “both”, because it’s two sides of the same coin.

Exodus 9:12: “And God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not hear them.” This is the first time that we read that “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” Five times before that statement, we see Pharaoh hardening his own heart.

In the end, while “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” the reality was, Pharaoh

sealed his own fate. God used Pharaoh's choices to accomplish his own purposes.

- **Paul's Parallel:**

Pharaoh's story is being repeated in Israel's own history. Notice Romans 9:18: God "hardens whom he wants to harden". The parallel is Israel's unbelief and Pharaoh's hardening.

God used Israel's unbelief in a similar way he used Pharaoh's hardening. God used Israel's unbelief to fulfill his own purposes. In the end, God's word not thwarted; it accomplished what he wants.

A similar passage: Galatians 4:21-26:

*Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.*

*These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*

Paul identifies the Jews under the Mosaic covenant with Hagar, but the Church is identified with Sarah.

Romans 9: Israel hardened their hearts and because of that, God also hardened them. In the end, like Pharaoh, Israel hardening served God's purposes.

Isaiah 29:10: "The Lord has brought over you a deep sleep; he has sealed your eyes; he has covered your heads."

What God said to Isaiah when he first called him: "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" - Isaiah 6:10.

Because Israel had hardened their hearts so many times against God's Word and His calling to repentance, God's Word produced spiritual blindness and deafness for them. The more they heard God's warnings – and resisted them – the more blind and deaf they became.

In Mark 4:12, Jesus repeats Isaiah's prophecy as the explanation for why he taught in parables. Those with open hearts were able to learn the meanings of the parables, while the hardened were left in the dark.

A similar passage: 2 Corinthians 3:14-15:

*But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.*

**Back to Romans 9.** Paul has introduced the illustration of Israel and Pharaoh, but he won't really explicate it until Romans 11:7-8: Israel's hardness against the gospel follows the same attitude found in Moses' day and Isaiah's day. Their hardening led to God hardening or blinding their hearts. Still, Israel sealed her own fate.

-- **Wrapping It Up:** Paul's teaching in Rom 9:14-18 is that God chooses whom he will harden and whom he will show mercy to. The pattern is the same that it was in Moses' and Pharaoh's situation.

Paul is not using the hardening of Pharaoh to explain individual election or exclusion. He is using it to show Israel's situation – in Moses' era, continuing down to their rejection of Christ.

Paul's purpose is not to explain Pharaoh's hardening, but Israel's. By showing that Israel's refusal to hear God's Word resulted in God hardening their hearts (spiritual blindness and deafness).

Paul lays the groundwork for Romans 11: "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

So, has God's Word failed? No! Is God unjust? No, not at all, because Israel's final story has yet to be revealed. Right now, we are in the age of the Gentiles, but eventually God's promises will be fulfilled.