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What Happens to Israel?: A Biblical-Theological Approach to the Question of Individual and Corporate Election in Romans 9-11

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Introduction

Exegetes and theologians have repeatedly wrestled with the vexing issues related to Paul’s perspective on election in Rom 9–11. Some have assigned to Paul mainly an individual view of election in these chapters, and others have assigned to him mainly a corporate view. Yet, Rom 9–11 only fully satisfies its rhetorical obligations

within Romans as a whole when *both* the individual *and* the corporate elements within Rom 9–11 have their full effect. That is, rather than arguing from either an individual or a corporate perspective on election over against the other, Paul prosecutes his argument in this pericope precisely by highlighting election as a divinely-established reality that takes shape in the interplay between its corporate and individual dynamics. Moreover, when the church attends properly to this interplay, Rom 9–11 provides her a more robust resource for her theological formation.

Romans 9–11 as Theodicy

As a unit, Rom 9–11 stands as Paul’s extended answer to the poignant, rhetorical situation that he brings to expression in Rom 9:1–6—namely, the apparent failure of God’s word.¹

Specifically, ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (*the word of God*) that concerns Paul here is the word that established Israel as God’s people (Rom 9:4b–5).² Yet, Paul’s immediately preceding argument has sought to establish that God’s loving presence has come afresh to those who stand in Christ (Rom 8:31–39). Hence, because the Ἰσραηλίται (*Israelites*), Paul’s συγγενεῖς . . . κατὰ σάρκα (*kinsfolk according to the flesh*), have not yielded their allegiance to God’s appointed messiah, they experience only the continuing curse from which the community of those who have become faithful to Jesus has been delivered [Ps 43:23 (OG; 44:22 HEB, ENG); Zech 11:4; Rom 8:36; 11:27; Gal 1–5; *Tg. Ket. Ps 44:22; Pss. Sol. 17; 2 Macc 7:37–38*].³

¹ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 17; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 472; cf. James W. Aageson, “Written Also for Our Sake: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Four Major Epistles, with a Study of 1 Corinthians 10,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 158; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., Black’s New Testament Commentaries 6 (London: Hendrickson, 1991), 164. Romans 9:1–5 clearly and viscerally poses this rhetorical exigence, but properly speaking, only in Paul’s initial response to it does he restate the exigence in terms of the failure of the divine word.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, ed. Ralf P. Martin and Lynn Allan Losie, vol. 38, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 640; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 571–72; Schreiner, *Romans*, 469–71. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 472; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 268–79, 299–301; cf. Ernst Würthwein, “Repentance and Conversion in the Old Testament,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, and Ronald E. Pitkin, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 981.

That is, such sheep as the Israelites, being without a divinely-appointed shepherd and heir to David's throne, still stood at the mercy of the wolves of divine judgment [cf. Ezek 37; Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34; Rom 1:3; 8:31–39; *Ahiqar* 2:43 (Arm.); *Pss. Sol.* 17]. In fact, this continuing exile of those to whom the word of God's blessing had apparently already come could almost have made Paul plead for his own damnation in exchange for the Israelites' blessing (Rom 9:3; 10:1).⁴

Yet, in the context of the Israelites' privileges, Paul's redefinition of 'Israel' (Rom 9:6a) qualifies these privileges and provides a basis for a response other than a desire for self-condemnation. Instead, Paul affirms that God's word has not failed and that a question about its failure in this case only arises when one mistakenly regards Israelites as coterminous with those who are ἐν Ἰσαὰκ καλοῦνται (*called in Isaac*).⁵ If one takes this faulty position, then God's word *has* failed because the Israelites—here contemplated as a group according to the unbelieving majority—had not received the blessings that God had guaranteed to them in numerous and varied ways (Rom 9:4b–5a; cf. CD 8:16–18).⁶ Moreover, in such a situation, the nascent Christian community might well have serious doubts about the veracity of what they thought God had guaranteed to them in Jesus.⁷ Consequently, Paul makes God's choice of *one* of Abraham's sons the cornerstone for his argument about the relationship(s) between the Israelites and the community that has coalesced around Jesus [cf. οὐ γὰρ . . . οὐδ' . . . ἀλλ' (*for not . . .*

⁴ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 164–65; Schreiner, *Romans*, 480–81, 557; James M. Scott, “For as Many as Are of the Works of the Law Are under a Curse” (Galatians 3.10),” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, vol. 83, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series: Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 213.

⁵ Cf. Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* 16.4–6 [*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 11:460–62]; Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul's Judaism?” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 153.

⁶ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 192; Piper, *Justification of God*, 40; cf. Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 360. Schreiner, *Romans*, 485, observes accurately enough that “[i]t is not as if gifts in the past actually contain the promise of future blessing.” Yet, the possibility that these gifts could be construed in this manner without regarding the distinctions God has made within Abraham's family itself is precisely the mistaken view that Paul confronts in his theodicy proper in Rom 9:6b–11:32 (cf. Rom 11:29; *Ibid.*, 486). Thus, the distinction may stand well enough from Paul's perspective, but it would likely not have stood so well in the eyes of those for whom Rom 9–11 was of most value in vindicating God's righteousness and faithfulness.

⁷ Piper, *Justification of God*, 19; Schreiner, *Romans*, 471.

neither . . . but); Rom 9:6-7].⁸ Once one correctly draws this distinction, those who are ἐν Ἰσαὰκ καλοῦνται (*called in Isaac*) and who, therefore, really are Ἰσραήλ (*Israel*) and σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ (*Abraham's seed*) actually *do* inherit, in Christ, what God had guaranteed to Abraham and his descendants and actually *do* experience afresh the loving presence and shepherding of this Son of David (Isa 11; 49; Rom 1:3; 8:31–39; 15:7–13).⁹

Paul's Argument for God's Faithfulness

Beginning with this thesis that God has indeed been faithful to his word (Rom 9:6a), Paul's organization of his proof falls into the following, logical units:

- 9:6b–21 ~ Who are Abraham's seed?
 - 9:6b–7 ~ Not all Abraham's descendants are seed.
 - 9:8–9 ~ Example of Abraham and Isaac.
 - 9:10–13 ~ Example of Isaac and Jacob.
 - 9:14–18 ~ Evaluation of an objection of divine injustice.
 - 9:19–21 ~ Evaluation of an objection of divine domination.
- 9:22–11:36 ~ Do Israelites stand among those whom God intends to bless?
 - 9:22–30 ~ God has purposed to bless both Israelites and Gentiles.
 - 9:31–10:21 ~ Analysis of the Israelites' non-blessing.
 - 11:1–10 ~ Evaluation of an objection about God's continued faithfulness to the Israelites.
 - 11:11–16 ~ Evaluation of an objection about God's purpose in the Israelites stumbling.
 - 11:17–32 ~ Evaluation of a potential for pride in believing Gentiles.

⁸ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 165–66.

⁹ Nanos, "Paul and Judaism," 158; Schreiner, *Romans*, 472, 476; cf. A. Andrew Das, "Paul and the Law: Pressure Points in the Debate," in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 109–10.

Recasting the relationships between the patriarchs' descendants and the patriarchs' heirs in Rom 9:6b–21 allows Paul to articulate in Rom 9:22–11:32 a way of including Gentiles in the people of Israel's God while also leaving room for the Israelites who would eventually return and repent.¹⁰ In this way, God's specific calls of Isaac and Jacob would propagate themselves to the blessing of the Gentiles and, subsequently, the restoration of the Israelites to share in this blessing (Rom 11:13–15).

Who Are Abraham's Seed? (9:6b–21)

Not All Abraham's Descendants Are Seed (9:6b–7)

In response to what might seem to be God's unfaithfulness, Paul frames his thesis in the flat denial: οὐχ οἷον . . . ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (*it is not such that the word of God has failed*; Rom 9:6a). This thesis is valid, first, because not all Israelites [οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ (*the ones from Israel*)] are Israel (Rom 9:6b).¹¹ As a justification for his previous statement, Paul's proposal of a disjunction between Israelites and Israel allows him to describe God's faithfulness to Israel rather differently from how those who questioned God's faithfulness about this issue would have described divine fidelity. Yet, Paul's proposal is also highly provocative because, in itself, it begs the question: If Israelites are not Israel, *then who are?*¹² For, the alignment of Israelites with Israel might well appear too obvious a thing to dispute.¹³ Therefore, to clarify his point, Paul suggests that not all Abraham's children are his seed (Rom 9:7a).¹⁴ Instead, Paul

¹⁰ Cf. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 341–42.

¹¹ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 169; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 331–32, 343, 355; Schreiner, *Romans*, 493.

¹² Ridderbos, *Paul*, 343.

¹³ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 169.

¹⁴ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 169; Schreiner, *Romans*, 494. The quotation in Rom 9:7b uses the name Ἰσαάκ (*Isaac*) to define more specifically the σπέρμα (*seed*), which comes to focus in that clause (Rom 9:7b). This way of constructing the sentence suggests that σπέρμα (*seed*) is the lesser known component in the previous clause and, hence, that it is the complement and that τέκνα (*children*) is the subject [Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 42–43]. Moreover, the pronominal adjective πάντες (*all*) also tags τέκνα (*children*) as the subject more heavily than σπέρμα (*seed*) is tagged in this instance (cf. *Ibid.*, 42–44, 253). Additionally, because the following section of Paul's argument addresses Isaac's selection *rather than* Ishmael's (Rom 9:8–9) and Jacob's selection *rather than* Esau's (Rom 9:10–13), the argument's general point is that not all who physically descend from the patriarchs are those to whom God made promises (cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 472). Consequently, Ἀβραάμ (*Abraham*) (Rom 9:7a) fits the argument better when construed with πάντες τέκνα (*all children of Abraham*) than it does when [Footnote continued on next page ...]

regards the promise of seed to Abraham as being a promise of seed *like Isaac* (Rom 9:7b),¹⁵ thereby relegating Ishmael simply to the status of τέκνον (*child*) as this status does *not* overlap with the status of σπέρμα (*seed*). Consequently, although Isaac is a τέκνον (*child*) (cf. Rom 9:8), he is more importantly *also* a σπέρμα (*seed*), but Ishmael is a τέκνον (*child*) *rather than* a σπέρμα (*seed*).¹⁶

Example of Abraham and Isaac (9:8–9)

These two sons have these particular statuses because of the means by which they were born. Isaac is considered to be a σπέρμα (*seed*) and a τέκνον θεοῦ (*child of God*) because he is a τέκνον ἐπαγγελίας (*child of promise*) (Rom 9:8). By contrast, Ishmael is unnamed in Rom 9, but here, as elsewhere (Gal 4:21–31), Ishmael’s status as a τέκνον σαρκός (*child of flesh*) provides a foil to Isaac that Paul uses to articulate more fully what a τέκνον ἐπαγγελίας (*child of promise*) actually is.¹⁷ Indeed, within the context of Paul’s current argument, this description works because of (γάρ) a specific promise that God made (ἐπαγγελίας . . . ὁ λόγος οὗτος) (Rom 9:9a)¹⁸—that is, that κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός (*at this time, I will come and Sarah will have a son*) (Rom 9:9b). Thus, Isaac bears the mantle of a τέκνον ἐπαγγελίας (*child of promise*) because of, or in consequence to, the divine promise about his mother, which was itself given to Abraham (Gen 18:10).¹⁹ God’s consideration of Abraham’s σπέρμα (*seed*) as being ἐν Ἰσαάκ (*in Isaac*) then immediately depends on two prior choices by God—namely, the choice of Abraham rather than anyone else in Ur (Gen 15:7; Neh 9:7) and the choice of Sarah rather than Hagar (Gen 17:15–21).²⁰

construed with σπέρμα (*seed of Abraham*). For, Paul’s argument here needs to address not the fact that not all children are seed of Abraham (e.g., ESV), for this fact would be patently obvious in the case of Gentiles. Rather, the argument needs to establish that not all Abraham’s children are his seed (e.g., NRSV). As such, one may best read Rom 9:7a in parallel to Rom 9:6a and primarily restating Rom 9:6b (Ibid., 494). Hence, one should understand something like οἷον (*such*) to influence the sense of the second οὐ + δὲ + ὅτι + verb construction in Rom 9:7a after the analogy of Rom 9:6a (e.g., NET, NRSV) (Ibid., 495).

¹⁵ Ibid., 496.

¹⁶ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 169–70; Schreiner, *Romans*, 496.

¹⁷ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 169–70.

¹⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 496.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 474.

²⁰ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 170.

Example of Isaac and Jacob (9:10–13)

To this chain of divine choice, Paul promptly adds another link that also represents the first of those who would be ἐν Ἰσαάκ (*in Isaac*)—namely, Jacob, or Israel, himself. Of course, regarding physical descent, Esau also was ἐν Ἰσαάκ (*in Isaac*), but while Rebekah was still pregnant, a word of promise came also to her (Rom 9:10): ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι (*the older will serve the younger*) (Rom 9:12).²¹ God delivered this word when he did because (γάρ; Rom 9:11), at this point, the twins were behaviorally equal and because God wanted his κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις (*purpose according to election*) to stand based on himself as the caller rather than based on works (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος; Rom 9:12). In this context, the ἔργα (*works*) based on which God's κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις (*purpose according to election*) does not stand certainly fit the categories of τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον (*anything good or bad*) (Rom 9:11a) with the implication that the presence of ἔργα (*works*) in either direction would jeopardize the clarity with which God's κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις (*purpose according to election*) would stand simply on God himself.²² Additionally, the prophets provide a complementary witness this dynamic: τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαῦ ἐμίσησα (*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*) (Rom 9:13b || Mal 1:2–3), which extends Paul's foregoing discussion of Jacob and Esau into a

²¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 476.

²² *Ibid.*, 499. Dunn, *Romans*, 38:543, appears to suggest greater continuity with Paul's use of the term ἔργα (*works*) in this instance and his references elsewhere to ἔργα νόμου (*works of the law*) [cf. N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Acts–First Corinthians*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al., vol. 10, The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 637]. The stated motive for making this connection rather more strongly is the desire to tie Jacob and Esau in this text to the historical sons of Isaac and Rebekah rather than to see Jacob and Esau simply acting as salvation-historical designations for Israelites and Edomites. Paul's description of the prophetic address to Rebekah about Jacob's primacy while she was pregnant with Jacob and Esau (Rom 9:10–13), however, establishes well that Paul refers, at least initially, to the historical individuals Jacob and Esau (cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 501–3). With the quotation from Mal 1:2–3 in Rom 9:14, these individual sons also attain, within Paul's argument, salvation-historical significance as heads of nations, but this added significance does not minimize the role that Jacob and Esau play in this text and in the following argument (see Rom 9:16) precisely as individuals. Concomitantly, if the term ἔργα (*works*) in Rom 9:12 does indeed summarize the τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον (*anything good or bad*) in the previous verse, then because this text presumes both Jacob and Esau as the non-doers at this point (μηδὲ πράξαντων; Rom 9:11), the text makes no distinction between which of the brothers did not do good or ill. Consequently, Paul makes no attempt to designate Jacob as the good doer in order to provide a foil for the way God's choice of Israel actually worked (cf. Moo, *Romans*, 572; Schreiner, *Romans*, 481–82). At the same time, an ἀγαθὸν ἔργον [(*good*) *work*], to qualify as such, would need to have been in step with the law's requirements (cf. CD 3:2–7), but Paul's own phraseology at this juncture suggests a more general referent for the phrase ἐξ ἔργων (*from works*) in Rom 9:11.

suggested explanation for the relative blessedness of the Israelites and the relative cursedness of the Edomites (cf. Mal 1:2–5).²³ Thus, in this instance, the election of the group is predicated upon the election of a previous individual.

Evaluation of an Objection of Divine Injustice (9:14–18)

Nevertheless, Paul still perceives that this manner of construing the issue may present difficulties for his audience, particularly because the perspective on election that he has just articulated could raise doubts about God’s righteousness (Rom 9:14).²⁴ This question may present itself less acutely in relation to the example of Isaac and Ishmael because these two individuals were, after all, only half-brothers, and Isaac was the son of the elect Sarah.²⁵ In the case of Jacob and Esau, however, both sons have the same two parents. Hence, if one accepts Paul’s assessment that God chose Jacob over Esau without reference to the deeds of either (Rom 9:11), then there may appear to be an insufficient basis for God’s choice of a younger son to inherit what would normally have rightfully belonged to the older (Rom 9:12).²⁶

For Paul, however, questioning God’s righteousness stands quite firmly out of bounds (μὴ γένοιτο; Rom 9:14), and to support this

²³ That is, although the unbelieving Israelites were still experiencing the curses of covenantal disobedience, they were at least experiencing a *covenantal* reality. For all the difficulties in their present condition, the Israelites still had a great number of advantages that Gentiles did not possess (Rom 3:1–2; 9:4b–5a).

²⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 505.

²⁵ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 170.

²⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 472, 498. Yet, the difficulty here arises not simply because God chooses some people and not others (Ibid., 506), for otherwise, this difficulty would permeate any discussion of election, even the election of Sarah rather than Hagar. Nevertheless, Paul does not appear to have perceived this objection as relevant at this point in his argument; thus, the force of the question here appears to be directed specifically toward God’s choice of a *younger* son to obtain what normally would have belonged to his *older* brother (cf. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 344). To the contrary, Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 170, asserts that “the original Hebrew [of Gen 25:23] could be correctly translated, ‘The elder shall serve the younger’ (so RV); the Greek could not in itself mean this, and Paul probably gave to the Greek its proper Greek meaning.” The question about the extent to which Paul’s lexical stock generally exhibits Semitic influence may remain open for the present, but Rom 9:12 imports ἐλάσσων from a context in which it translates a Hebrew base text in a context that discusses a divine announcement about twin brothers (Gen 25:23 LXX). Thus, this text’s translator(s) apparently felt the use of ἐλάσσων to have been appropriate in this context. Moreover, especially because Paul uses this term within a quotation that helps him sketch in miniature the relevant points of Genesis’s narrative about Jacob and Esau, positing semantic borrowing in Rom 9:12 seems, at a minimum, quite plausible and brings a metaphorical usage of μείζων and ἐλάσσων to designate older and younger siblings well within the range of probability for Paul in Rom 9:12 [see Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 87–97].

assessment’s correctness (γάρ),²⁷ Paul cites God’s words to Moses, ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω (*I will pity whomever I pity, and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion*) (Rom 9:15 || Exod 33:19).²⁸ Yet, rather than supporting Paul’s assertion, this quotation might seem to confirm the *objection*, for Paul’s argument about election *has created precisely this problem*—God chooses to bless *whomever* (ὅς ἂν) *he wishes* without reference to the uprightness of the one thus blessed (Rom 9:11). Therefore, in this case, Paul’s argument works circuitously by specifically citing the *divine* voice to Moses when it affirms essentially what Paul himself has been arguing. For, Paul shares with his audience the assumption that, any and all appearances to the contrary, God ultimately *is* righteous. Consequently, when *God himself* affirms his own acts of blessing to be based on his choice rather than on the preceding acts of the individuals he blesses, this statement shows that an objection about God’s righteousness in this choice comes from a faulty perspective.²⁹ Because God cannot be unrighteous and because God affirms his own choice as his blessing’s foundation, then Paul’s point may stand that God’s choice of Jacob (ὁ τρέχων; Gen 27:42–28:5; Rom 9:16a) over Esau (ὁ θέλων; Gen 27:31–41; Rom 9:16a; Heb 12:17)—and, therefore, Israel over Edom (Rom 9:13)—has a legitimate basis in God’s will (Rom 9:16b).³⁰

²⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 506.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 505.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 634–35.

³⁰ By contrast, when one abstracts ὁ τρέχων (*he who runs*) and ὁ θέλων (*he who wills*) (Rom 9:16a) into general metaphors for non-salvific, human experience (e.g., Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 173; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 345; Schreiner, *Romans*, 505, 508), this abstraction does not fit as well within the tight logic of this argument that Paul is developing to address the specific, historical situation of ethnic Israel’s rejection of the restorative plan that God had brought to fruition in Jesus. Paul could certainly have adopted metaphors like ‘running’ and ‘willing’ to refer to the good or bad actions that he has already mentioned in the text (Rom 9:11a). One wonders, however, whether the collocation of *these* two metaphors *together* in a context that has just discussed Jacob and Esau, whom the biblical tradition describes with cognate terms, does not very strongly suggest that these two metaphors refer to these two individuals.

On the other hand, Paul’s generalizing ὅς ἂν (*whoever*) constructions in the previous verse (Rom 9:15) might constitute evidence that Paul also intended generic referents for the following metaphors of ὁ τρέχων (*him who runs*) and ὁ θέλων (*him who wills*) (Rom 9:16). In principle, rather than arguing about the specific case of Jacob and Esau, Paul could still establish his response to objection of Rom 9:14a–b if he established that God *never* acts as the objection portrays. In this scenario, that God did not act in this manner in Jacob and Esau’s specific case would then necessarily follow.

Yet, this principalizing reading of Rom 9:16 fails to account sufficiently for Paul’s following citation of the scripture’s word τῷ Φαραῶ (*to Pharaoh*) (Rom 9:17). Had Paul wished to argue deductively from [Footnote continued on next page ...]

As an additional confirmation for this perspective that centers election on the divine will,³¹ Paul calls into service Exod 9:16: εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά σε-ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν δύναμίν μου καὶ ὅπως διαγγεῖλῃ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ (*for this very thing I raised you up: in order that I might demonstrate my power in you and in order that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth*) (Rom 9:17 || Exod 9:16). Within the Exodus narrative itself, this statement articulates both the blessing of God upon Pharaoh (ἐξήγειρά σε; Rom 9:17) and, consequently, Egypt as well. Moreover, this statement also discloses the two purposes for which this blessing was given—namely, the display of God’s power and the proclamation of his name (Rom 9:17; cf. 1QHa 9:27–31). As such, this divine blessing and purpose provide a reason [אולם (*but*);³² Exod 9:16] that God had not, by this point in the Exodus narrative, already smitten and destroyed Pharaoh and all Egypt when they attempted to keep Israel in captivity (Exod 9:15, 17).

Thus (ἄρα οὖν; Rom 9:18a), one may say that God blessed Egypt generally (Gen 41:46–49, 53–57) and Pharaoh’s office specifically (Gen 47:13–26) by the hand of Joseph in order to bless both Egypt and Israel while יעקב גר בארץ חם (*Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham*; Ps 105:23; cf. Gen 50:19–21). For, in Rom 9, Paul’s

the general state of humans before God to prove his specific point in the case of God’s dealings with Jacob and Esau, Paul could have cited texts other than Exod 9:16 (e.g., Prov 16:14), or he could have cited Exod 9:16 simply with the formula λέγει . . . ἡ γραφή (*the scripture says*) (Rom 9:17) without specifically recalling to his audience’s minds that this word was originally directed to Pharaoh. When citing scripture, however, Paul does not regularly identify an original addressee. Indeed, of the Pauline citations of scripture that Moisés Silva, “Old Testament in Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 631, lists, Paul specifies original addressees only in Rom 9:12, 15, 17; 10:21; 11:2–4; Gal 3:8, 16. Other than the scripture’s address to Pharaoh in Rom 9:17, the original addressee that Paul cites in these other texts always plays a significant role within Paul’s argument as a specific individual in Israel’s history. That is, Paul seemingly never cites an original addressee unless that addressee, as such, is significant for Paul’s argument. Hence, Paul’s reference to Pharaoh in Rom 9:17 makes most sense within this larger pattern for Paul’s biblical citations if one gives full force to Paul’s observation that this particular address was given to *Pharaoh himself*. In turn, the specificity of the quoted scripture’s address to Pharaoh makes most sense in the specific context of Jacob and Esau that had occupied Paul in Rom 9:10–13. Consequently, although Paul’s logic in quoting Exod 33:19 in Rom 9:15 is explicitly deductive [ὅς ἄν (*whoever*)], demonstrating God’s righteousness in how he chose Jacob—that is, *Israel*—remains Paul’s central occupation in employing this quotation just as this occupation predominates Paul’s argument in the framing verses (Rom 9:14, 16–18) and finds reinforcement in Paul’s explicit quotation of a word τῷ Μωϋσῆϊ (*to Moses*) (Rom 9:15), through whom Torah came to Israel (cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 506–8).

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 508.

³² The preceding ἢ is, of course, also formally disjunctive, but אולם (*but*) provides a much clearer adversative element to situate this clause within the surrounding narrative.

discussion of Pharaoh appears to unite conceptually two different occupants of this office—the one that knew Joseph and the one that did not (cf. Exod 1:8)—so that they effectively function as one individual. Pharaoh as an individual or an individual office, therefore, presents another example of someone whom God chose to pity (Rom 9:18a), but at the same time, Pharaoh also constitutes an example of one whom God chose to harden (Rom 9:18b || Exod 4:21; 7:3, 13–14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). By this hardening, Pharaoh would be reluctant toward letting the Israelites leave Egypt (Exod 4:21), and God would have an additional opportunity to work powerfully in Israel’s behalf and so gain glory for himself (Exod 10:1; 14:4, 17).³³ Hence, as Jacob and the Israelites and Esau and the Edomites were linked through Isaac and Rebekah, blessing and retribution came on Egypt because of two different divine choices with respect to the same office.

Evaluation of an Objection of Divine Domination (9:19–21)

Yet, in Pharaoh’s case, Paul represents the divine choice as taking place not so much between blessing and non-blessing (Rom 9:15–16) as between blessing and *hardening* (Rom 9:18; cf. CD 1:13) as was the present case with the ethnic Israelites (Rom 11:7b, 25; cf. Luke 2:34).³⁴ That is, in the blessing and hardening of different occupants of Pharaoh’s office and of different groups—i.e., the Israelites and the Egyptians—then under this office’s authority,³⁵ Paul finds a poignant corollary to the blessing and hardening of the same, ethnic people of God whose persistent rejection of their God’s purposes for them in Jesus has prompted Paul’s theodicy in the first place. Consequently, if divine choice might lead to God’s assuming such an actively negative role in hardening the Israelites as he did with Pharaoh, then this action raises a question about why God does actually find fault (Rom 9:19).³⁶

³³ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 509–10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 505, regards these two parts of Paul’s argument as roughly synonymous, but the fact that they implicitly raise slightly different objections (Rom 9:14, 19), however, suggests that Paul’s argument addresses a slightly different issue in each instance. Consequently, the distinction proposed here should be maintained.

³⁵ That is, Rom 9:18’s division between pitying and hardening reflects both the difference between the Pharaoh who knew Joseph and the one who did not (Exod 1:8) and the difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites under the rule of the same Pharaoh who did not know Joseph.

³⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 513–14.

To be sure, this negative, divine evaluation relates to the blessing and hardening of Pharaoh that Paul has just explicitly discussed (Rom 9:17–18), but the pressing issue for Paul’s argument is how Pharaoh’s situation applies to and explicates the situation of *Israel*. Indeed, this argumentative trajectory shortly becomes quite clear as Paul proposes a recasting of those who receive God’s blessings in terms of [ο]ὔς . . . ἐκάλεσεν . . . οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν (*those whom he has called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles*) (Rom 9:24). Hence, persistent, divine fault-finding does raise the independent questions of Rom 9:19 in relation to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh’s hardening does not present a rhetorical exigence that demands theodicy from Paul because Egypt never received the specific guarantees of divine favor that the Israelites did (cf. Rom 9:1–5).³⁷ Thus, Paul’s argument metaphorically places Pharaoh’s blessing and hardening as an interpretive lens for Israel’s blessing and hardening.³⁸ In this later scenario, however, if God is responsible for Israel’s hardening (i.e., their resistance toward accepting Jesus’ messianic claim), why would they continue to be objects of divine retribution? For, in this case, they have executed precisely the role that God chose for them to execute, and in this highly significant sense, the Israelites have actually *not* resisted God’s designs (Rom 9:19b).³⁹

Nevertheless, inasmuch as this question suggests an overbearing and, therefore, unrighteous divine will, Paul rebukes it, as he did previously, for deriving from an incorrect perspective.⁴⁰ The question assumes that the one asking it can judge the merits of divine action, but Paul sees this mode of questioning as putting the theological cart before the horse (Rom 9:20a). Rather, one should begin by *presuming God’s righteousness*, and then one should seek to discern how that righteousness has been manifested in God’s concrete actions in history (Rom 9:20–21).⁴¹ The biblical text that Paul selects

³⁷ Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* 16.6 (*NPNF1*, 11:460–61); cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 569.

³⁸ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 357.

³⁹ Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 38:556.

⁴⁰ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 175; Schreiner, *Romans*, 513, 515, 634–35; Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” 641.

⁴¹ Cf. Grant Osborne, *Romans*, vol. 6, *InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 590.

to support this methodological reversal also suggests that Paul principally directs this part of his argument toward the Israelites and their continuing exile. For, the quotation *μη ἐρεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι· τί με ἐποίησας οὕτως*; (*the lump of clay should not say to its molder, “Why did you make me thus?” should it?*) (Rom 9:20b), perhaps reflecting a combined Isa 29:16; 45:9 text or some other adaptation of related traditions (e.g., Jer 18:1–11; Wis 15:7–17; Sir 33:13; *T. Naph.* 2:1–5; 1QHa 9:21–23; 11:22–24; 12:24; 1QS 11:21–22), reflects language that also occurs in contexts that address the Israelites’ release from oppression and hint about this release’s implications or cognate developments among the Gentiles (e.g., Isa 29:17–24; 45:13–25; Wis 15:7–17; cf. 1QHa 11).⁴²

In Paul’s metaphor, the potter *certainly* has the right to make from a lump of clay whatever he wishes for whatever purpose, and this metaphor holds as an explanation of God’s rights over people—particularly over Israel—based on God’s presumed righteousness (cf. Rom 9:20a). Thus, exercising this right to make ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος (*from the same lump of clay*) (Rom 9:21) vessels εἰς τιμὴν (*for honor*) and εἰς ἀτιμίαν (*for dishonor*) is Paul’s metaphoric summary of his argument to this point (cf. Wis 15:7). God did, in fact, make from Abraham both Isaac εἰς τιμὴν (*for honor*) and Ishmael, relatively speaking (cf. Gen 17:18–21), εἰς ἀτιμίαν (*for dishonor*). From Isaac and Rebekah, God made Jacob εἰς τιμὴν (*for honor*) and Esau εἰς ἀτιμίαν (*for dishonor*).⁴³ Similarly, by Joseph’s administration, God honored Egypt under the Pharaoh who knew Joseph, and he dishonored Egypt under the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. Moreover, under this later Pharaoh’s governance, God honored the Israelites and dishonored the Egyptians.

⁴² Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 516. In the context of Paul’s argument, the personified lump has effectively just questioned God about this point; therefore, the future indicative form ἐρεῖ (*it will say*) should be understood as deliberative [Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Robert Walter Funk, trans. Robert Walter Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), §366; Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 465–66, 467–68, 570].

⁴³ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 622.

Do Israelites Stand among Those Whom God Intends to Bless? (9:22–11:36)

At this point in the argument, Paul introduces an extensive conditional construction, which properly spans Rom 9:22–31.⁴⁴ By the time Paul reaches the apodosis of the condition in Rom 9:30b–31, however, the conditional syntax begun in Rom 9:22 has long since dissipated. Therefore, Paul makes explicit with the question *Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν;* (*What, therefore, should we say?*) (Rom 9:30a) the notional transition from condition to conclusion.⁴⁵ Overall, the condition's protasis (Rom 9:22–29) has much the sense of "If this preceding argument holds, particularly at these few specific points," then the apodosis of Rom 9:30b–31 should follow. That is, Paul has just demonstrated by example (Rom 9:7–21) that God has blessed and not blessed, pitied and hardened, certain individuals according to his own choice (Rom 9:22–23), and from this argument, follows the conclusion that Paul will detail more in Rom 9:30b–31.⁴⁶

God Has Purposed to Bless Both Israelites and Gentiles (9:22–30)

Within this conditional structure, however, Paul feels the need to clarify the *σκεύη ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν* (*vessels of pity*,

⁴⁴ Contra *Ibid.*, 525.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 535. Dunn, *Romans*, 38:558; Moo, *Romans*, 604, by contrast, understand the condition as incomplete. The syntax of Rom 9:24, however, suggests that it should not be punctuated as the beginning of a new sentence (e.g., NA²⁷) but, instead, should be understood as further describing the *σκεύη ἐλέους* (*vessels of pity*) that Paul has just mentioned. In addition, the *ὡς* (*as*) that begins Rom 9:25 and the resumptive construction *καὶ καθὼς* (*and just as*) that begins Rom 9:29 suggest that one should read Paul's whole quotation string in Rom 9:25–29 as being illustratively tied to the preceding protasis material in Rom 9:22–24. In this way, Rom 9:30–31 forms the logical, if not syntactical apodosis for what Paul himself seems to have perceived as the overly lengthy and complicated protasis in Rom 9:22–29. For, if the condition's protasis were quite intricate, the more explicitly inferential question in Rom 9:30a would provide a good transition into Paul's summary of the implications of everything that he had just summarized.

⁴⁶ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 519, 21–22. Consequently, although Paul does later translate into salvific language this analysis and the transition from the negative to the positive sides of these pairs (e.g., Rom 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26), "the issue informing all of Rom. 9–11" is primarily God's righteousness rather than specifically salvation (contra *Ibid.*, 517). The two themes are certainly related, as Paul's argument demonstrates. Salvation is, however, *one* of the *effects* of God's righteousness, which is explicitly non-salvific in its hardening of Pharaoh and part of Israel. In Paul's argument, God's righteousness receives its final vindication in the inclusion of Gentiles within the covenant people and the salvation of Israel's hardened part (Rom 11:1–32), but regarding salvation as the central thread of Rom 9–11 blunts the specificity of Paul's theodicy. One group of people that receives scarcely any attention in Rom 9–11 are unbelieving Gentiles because these Gentiles would serve no function in Paul's central argument for God's righteousness. On the other hand, were Paul primarily concerned with 'salvation' as such, the absence of any substantive discussion of this class of Gentiles would constitute a significant hole in Paul's argument.

which [God] prepared beforehand for glory) (Rom 9:23b) as being [ο]ὔς . . . ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν (*us whom he called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles*) (Rom 9:24).⁴⁷ Hence, Paul reminds his audience that Gentiles may be among these σκεύη ἐλέους (*vessels of pity*), but he has already argued this point at length earlier in the epistle (e.g., Rom 2–4). Instead, the specific point at issue here is whether Israelites, given their current hostility toward God’s appointed messiah, may also still be included among these σκεύη ἐλέους (*vessels of pity*), something that Paul amply demonstrates with one quotation from Hosea (Rom 9:25–26 || Hos 2:1, 25) and two from Isaiah (Rom 9:27–29 || Isa 1:9; 10:22; cf. Hos 2:1). Therefore, as Paul has argued previously in the letter, the Gentiles find righteousness by faith, although they had not previously really sought righteousness at all (Rom 9:30b).

Analysis of the Israelites’ Non-Blessing (9:31–10:21)

On the other hand, Israel pursued a νόμον δικαιοσύνης (*law of righteousness*) (Rom 9:31). Despite the inclusion of at least some Israelites in God’s chosen σκεύη ἐλέους (*vessels of pity*), Israel did not actually reach righteousness by means of the law because (διὰ τί; Rom 9:32a) Israel mostly pursued the law as though works rather than faith would situate them as the heirs of God’s promises to Abraham (Rom 3:27–4:25; 9:32b).⁴⁸ In so doing, however, they actually failed to obtain this blessing for themselves because God had designated, as the means to appropriate this inheritance, faith in the messianic seed on whom these divine promises finally came (Rom 9:32c–33).⁴⁹ Within this context, Rom 10 stands as Paul’s taxonomy of the Israelites’ rebellion against the manifestation of God’s righteousness in Jesus (Rom 10:3–4).⁵⁰ Moreover, the repeated references to Deut 30 in Rom 10:5–13 help Paul explicitly situate the consequences of this present rebellion as a subset of the consequences that God had promised would accompany covenantal disobedience (Rom 10:6–8 || Deut 30:12–14).⁵¹ Those who would faithfully obey the gospel of

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 528.

⁴⁸ Cf. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 180; Schreiner, *Romans*, 533, 538–40.

⁴⁹ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 183; Schreiner, *Romans*, 537.

⁵⁰ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 179, 182.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 555, 557–58, 573.

Jesus as they heard it proclaimed—whether they were Israelites or Gentiles—would indeed come to be included in the people whom God was restoring to himself (Deut 30:2–10, 20; Rom 1:5; 10:11–17; cf. CD 15:12–13; 1QS 5:8–10, 20–22; 4Q271 f4ii:3; 11Q19 59:9–13).⁵² Moreover, Israelites had, of course, heard this announcement just as Gentiles had heard it (Rom 10:18).⁵³ Nevertheless, by and large, those who had received and submitted to this message had been Gentiles, and those who had rejected and disobeyed it had been Israelites (Rom 10:19–21).⁵⁴

Evaluation of an Objection about God’s Continued Faithfulness to the Israelites (11:1–10)

Yet, so far from actually resolving the difficulty that the Israelites’ obduracy poses for Paul because of the apparent guarantees of God’s favor toward the Israelites (Rom 9:1–6a), Paul’s taxonomy of Israel’s rebellion in Rom 9:31–10:21 merely clarifies the nature of that rebellion. Moreover, if Paul’s quotation of Isa 65:2 in Rom 10:21 is at all to be understood in connection with Rom 9:19–24, as Rom 11:7b, 25 would seem to suggest, then Paul’s taxonomy in Rom 9:31–10:21 may *further exacerbate* the difficulty that the Israelites’ rebellion presents.⁵⁵ For, in this case again, God has set himself against those to whom he had previously, to all appearances, vouchsafed his fidelity.

Given these guarantees and the openness of the gospel proclamation to the Israelites (οὐ̅ν; Rom 11:1a), Paul firmly denies that ἀπώσατο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ (*God has rejected his people*) [Rom 11:1–2 || 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 94 (OG 93):14].⁵⁶ Although Paul gives fairly exclusive attention to the Israelites as a corporate body in Rom 9:31–10:21, Paul cites himself as an initial evidence for how the gospel of Jesus represents the culmination of God’s purposes to bless his people and how this gospel does not imply God’s rejection of

⁵² Schreiner, *Romans*, 541, 566–67; N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 127, 130–31; Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” 660; N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 138–9.

⁵³ Moo, *Romans*, 666–67; Schreiner, *Romans*, 564–65, 571–72.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 473.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁵⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 674; Schreiner, *Romans*, 577, 579.

ethnic Israel.⁵⁷ For, Paul *himself* was of Israelite descent (Rom 11:1c). Consequently, insofar as Paul is God's servant in behalf of this gospel, this gospel does not entail divine rejection of Israelites.⁵⁸ In other words, if one Israelite (e.g., Paul) has not been rejected, then self-evidently, not all Israelites have been rejected.

Nor is this present situation unique in the history of God's dealings with the Israelites (Rom 11:5a).⁵⁹ For, in the days of Elijah, most Israelites had apostatized, rejecting the true God and preferring instead to worship Baal (Rom 11:2b–4). Yet, God persisted in his faithfulness toward the Israelites by preserving for himself 7000 men who did not commit this apostasy (Rom 11:4). Indeed, God preserved this remnant by his own gracious choice (κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος), as was also true in the present case (οὕτως . . . καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ; Rom 11:5),⁶⁰ despite previous, Israelite attempts to define by works the remnant of God's people that had fully returned from exile (οὐκέτι ἐξ ἔργων; Rom 11:6a).⁶¹ Therefore, although ethnic Israel had, generally speaking, not obtained the righteousness that they sought and had been hardened according to God's plan (Rom 9:31–32a; 10:3–4; 11:7a, 8–10), the elect remnant did obtain this righteousness (Rom 11:7b).⁶²

⁵⁷ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 193; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 519–20; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 357; Schreiner, *Romans*, 577–78.

⁵⁸ Indeed, although the veracity of Paul's apostleship is not especially under attack in this instance, even if it were, Paul's argument here would still work well as long as his audience would grant that Paul was not a theological masochist. For, it would not be in Paul's own interests, as an Israelite, to hold a doctrine of God's dealings with ethnic Israel that entailed God's final rejection of the nation (Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 192).

⁵⁹ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 192–93; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 521.

⁶⁰ Paul's inference to this effect [οὖν (*therefore*); Rom 11:5] relies implicitly on the accepted fact of God's righteousness. Because God is righteous and he has acted previously as Paul has outlined (Rom 9:6b–13; 11:2–5), then God may act thus again in the present situation and still be righteous.

⁶¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 557–58, 562. The rhetorical force of Paul's justification for this assertion, ἐπεὶ ἡ χάρις οὐκέτι γίνεται χάρις (*otherwise grace is no longer grace*) (Rom 11:6b), depends on the validity of his previous argument to the effect that God's choice is depends on himself rather than on the performance of good or bad acts (Rom 9:10–16).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 587. Rather than treating Rom 11:7's opposition between ἡ . . . ἐκλογὴ (*the elect*) and οἱ . . . λοιποὶ (*the rest*) as an opposition between those who are or are not included in the remnant, Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 521–22, would prefer to describe this opposition "in terms of Israel caught up in the eschatological tension. For each of the terms sometimes merges into and sometimes stands in distinction from the others. And that reflects the character of the divided 'I' of Israel — both the Israel which is currently missing out and the Israel which is already experiencing the eschatological grace in Christ through faith." Yet, in this instance, rather than disagreeing with the reading proposed here, Dunn's point seems primarily to be that the terms involved are not technical for Paul and may come into [Footnote continued on next page . . .]

Evaluation of an Objection about God’s Purpose in Israelite Stumbling (11:11–16)

Yet, were God to have ordained this stumbling so that the rebellious portion of ethnic Israel might be further fractured (ἵνα πέσωσιν) (Rom 11:11; cf. Psa 37:23–24; 118:22; Isa 8:14–15; Luke 20:17–18; Rom 9:32–33) and were he to fulfill his guarantees to Israel in this seemingly strange way, then the value of these guarantees to Israel and, by extension, perhaps also to the Christian community, could still be put into question.⁶³ Therefore, Paul argues that God’s goal in this stumbling was the movement of salvation to the nations (e.g., Acts 8:1–4; cf. Rom 11:19–20a, 28a) in order that Israel might thereby see how this blessing was actually to be obtained and be motivated to seek it by that route (Rom 10:19; 11:11b–15).⁶⁴ For, in the divine economy of salvation with which Paul was aligned, these hardened Israelites’ rejection would entail reconciliation for all peoples, and their fresh reception would complete the return from exile that God had promised to effect (Ezek 37:11; Rom 11:15).⁶⁵ For, the election of both the patriarchs and the remnant itself implicitly witness to the special situation of those who are currently rejected but

different connections and have different referents at different points in his argument (see *Ibid.*, 522 n. 111), an observation which is quite appropriate.

⁶³ Cf. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 522–23; Nanos, “Paul and Judaism,” 158; Schreiner, *Romans*, 593. Alternatively, the issue here may again be the implications of the present situation and argument for God’s righteousness, but because Paul addresses the Israelites’ continued significance in God’s overall plan and because Paul does not immediately erupt with μή γένοιτο (*certainly not*) as he has done previously when beginning to respond to objections about God’s seeming unrighteousness, the more immediate issue at this point does appear to be the status of ethnic Israel itself.

⁶⁴ Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 523; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 359; Schreiner, *Romans*, 473–74, 592–94.

⁶⁵ Contra Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 524; Schreiner, *Romans*, 599. As N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 262–63, observes, the New Testament does not regularly employ resurrection language to address Israelite incorporation into the community to whom the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant has come in Jesus. Yet, the link between Rom 11 and Ezek 37 is particularly strong because, in addition to the resemblances between the language and themes possibly used of Israelite restoration in these texts, Ezek 37:24–28 also foresees, in this restoration, the renewal of Davidic kingship over the nation (cf. *Ibid.*, 3:263), something that Paul also understands as having already occurred in Jesus (Rom 1:3). Additionally, if Paul had wanted to designate physical rather than metaphoric resurrection in Rom 11:15, he could easily have employed the noun ἀνάστασις (*resurrection*) rather than the phrase ζωὴ ἐκ νεκρῶν (*life from the dead*) as he has already done in his preceding argument (e.g., Rom 1:4; 6:5). The construction employed, however, while nearly equivalent semantically, is less of a technical term than ἀνάστασις (*resurrection*) and, therefore, perhaps more open to metaphoric adaptation.

still organically linked to the remnant and to their patriarchal root (Rom 9:21; 11:4–5, 16, 28b).⁶⁶

Evaluation of the Potential for Pride in Believing Gentiles (11:17–32)

This root also provides the means through which the Gentiles come to partake of the Israelites' blessings—that is, by being reckoned through faith to be seed of Abraham, as the first and prototypical patriarch (Rom 4:13–25; 11:18b). Consequently, Gentiles who have been reckoned to be children should not boast over the portion of Abraham's physical descendants who have, at this point, been rejected (Rom 11:17–18a, 20b).⁶⁷ For, these physical descendants were reckoned not to be Abraham's seed because of their unbelief (τῆ ἀπιστίας ἐξεκλάσθησαν; Rom 11:20a), for true seed would have shared the belief characteristic of the father (Rom 4; Gal 3:7–9). Therefore, if God were willing to account physical descent from Abraham as naught and reckon as non-seed physical descendants who did not share Abraham's faith, then Gentiles who share *only* Abraham's faith *certainly* have *no* reason to expect God's continued kindness toward them if they abandon the faith they share with Abraham (Rom 11:23).⁶⁸ Hence, Gentiles who have come to share Abraham's faith do not have the luxury of lauding this fact over Israelites who have not come to share in this same faith. Instead, these Gentiles—because they lack physical descent from Abraham—need to cling all the more firmly to the faith that they share with him in order to experience the blessing that comes to Abraham's seed (Rom 11:22–24).

Indeed, in addition to the election of the patriarchs and the Israelite remnant, that God could reckon anyone of *non*-Israelite descent to be Abraham's seed necessarily establishes the possibility that God could again reckon to be Abraham's seed those Israelites who are presently rejected (Rom 11:24).⁶⁹ Moreover, once this restoration actually happens, Gentiles who share Abraham's faith will

⁶⁶ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 200; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 520; Schreiner, *Romans*, 593.

⁶⁷ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 201; Schreiner, *Romans*, 471.

⁶⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 607.

⁶⁹ Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 203; Schreiner, *Romans*, 612.

all the more clearly have no reason to boast over *any* group of Israelites (Rom 9:13, 16; 11:25–27).⁷⁰ Still more, even presently disobedient Israelites (cf. Rom 10:21) are loved because God had vouchsafed himself to the patriarchs (Rom 9:13; 11:28b–29; cf. CD 6:2–3; 19:28–31; 1QM 14:8–9).⁷¹ For, again, in this present, partial disobedience, God had actually purposed to welcome Gentiles and, subsequently, to re-welcome disobedient Israelites (Rom 11:30–31).⁷² Therefore, at long last, Paul brings his argument full circle to assure his audience of God’s faithfulness to the Israelites.⁷³ Ironic and unthinkably amazing as it may seem, God actually committed all these disobedient Israelites to disobedience in order that he might eventually pity them (Rom 11:32–36).⁷⁴

A Summary of the Role of Election in the Theodicy of Romans 9–11

In Rom 9–11, then, election frequently functions as a bridge between the concrete, inscripturated witness to God’s historical choice of the patriarchs and—if Jesus really is, as Paul argues, the culmination of God’s purposes for Israel—the apparently offscoured body of the patriarchs’ descendants. The *wrong* perspective on election that Paul consistently combats in this argument turns this observable difference into a painfully difficult exigence that demands resolution. For, this perspective would turn the patriarchs’ election into an unbreakable *imprimatur* for the patriarchs’ descendants, thereby failing properly to reckon with the possibility that these descendants might rebel against and, thereby, show themselves

⁷⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 613, 620.

⁷¹ Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 524; Schreiner, *Romans*, 625–26.

⁷² Cf. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 527. Thus, πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται (*all Israel will be saved*), in this context, seems not to mean “100% of the numerical total of a census of individual Israelites” but rather “combining all parts of Israel”—namely, the two parts consisting of (1) the present remnant and (2) those who are presently rejected [Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 199, 206; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 608; cf. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 358–61; Schreiner, *Romans*, 615; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979; repr., Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 89 n. 16]. In step with the backdrop of Ezek 37 suggested for Rom 11:15, 1QS 4:17–26 similarly seems to speak metaphorically of a restoration of a whole Israel, against the backdrop of Ezek 36, by the cleansing and restoration of its presently rebellious part.

⁷³ Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 528; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 360; Schreiner, *Romans*, 615.

⁷⁴ Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 528–29; Schreiner, *Romans*, 632; cf. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 209.

unworthy of their patriarchal heritage.⁷⁵ Still more, this perspective on election would come nowhere close to anticipating the antidote that Paul proposes for the problem that Rom 9–11 addresses—namely, that God actually *intended* to reject some Israelites *temporarily* in order to accept Gentiles and that this intention could be consistent with and cogently derivable from God’s historical interaction with the patriarchs themselves.⁷⁶ Consequently, in Paul’s argument, the election of the individual patriarchs implies the election of the body of their descendants.⁷⁷ Yet, even if only some of these descendants were enjoying the benefits of that election, God was still well within his rights to establish his intention to bless both Israelites and Gentiles by whatever route he might choose.

Toward Not Begging the Systematic Question

To end the present discussion at this point, however, would still be to beg the question about individual and corporate election in Rom 9–11 if one asks this question from a systematic-theological perspective.⁷⁸ For, asked within this context, the question that ostensibly contains the same terms designates by these terms distinctly different categories than the ones most explicitly at play within Rom 9–11 itself. Indeed, while Paul needed, for his purposes, only to address the election of certain individuals (i.e., the patriarchs) and of a body of people connected to these individuals (i.e., ethnic Israel) (cf. CD 1:1–11), a systematic-theological context would refer the terms ‘individual’ and ‘corporate’ not primarily to the *object* of God’s elective act but to the *mode* of this act.⁷⁹ Where Paul reports God as having chosen individuals, he clearly enough chose them as individuals, although this choice certainly did not ignore these

⁷⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 469, 530; cf. Charles H. Cosgrove, “Paul and Ethnicity: A Selective History of Interpretation,” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 96 n. 127; Das, “Paul and the Law,” 109–10.

⁷⁶ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 597.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 356.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 676–78; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 471–73.

individuals' connections to groups.⁸⁰ Yet, as these choices propagate to the body of ethnic Israel, did God also adopt an *individual mode* of election so that the elect individuals constitute the body,⁸¹ or did God adopt a *corporate mode* of election so that the elect body comprises whatever individuals it may contain?⁸²

Of course, asking a text questions that the text was not designed to answer can present some difficulties.⁸³ Yet, to avoid asking such questions or to declare them to be out of bounds is scarcely helpful, not least because Paul's response to his own rhetorical exigence itself *creates*, for modern, Protestant theology, a *different* rhetorical exigence. Therefore, the task remaining here is to suggest a way of attending carefully to Rom 9–11's nuances that may address elective modes to some degree without also pulling the rest of Paul's argument out of joint.

The exigence that prompts Rom 9–11 relates to the group of ethnic Israelites. Consequently, much of Paul's argument is occupied with this group as a group in itself and in relation to other groups. Perhaps the text that draws attention most poignantly to a *corporate mode* of election in relation to an elect group is Rom 10:11–13, which assigns deliverance to everyone who believes (v11) or calls (v13) on the Lord. Thus, this text refers its promises to *the class of* believing and calling people.⁸⁴

Simply to observe a corporate mode of election at work, however, does not entirely resolve the question posed here, for the choice of a group does not necessarily imply anything about whether the chooser at all attends to individual group members or not. By contrast, attendance to individuals within an elect group would imply, by tautological necessity, that the group itself is *not* chosen *only* as a group and *without* reference to the individuals that constitute that

⁸⁰ Cf. Brian J. Abasciano, "Corporate Election in Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schreiner," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006): 354–55, 366–67.

⁸¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 498.

⁸² Abasciano, "Corporate Election in Romans 9," 353, 365–66.

⁸³ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 472.

⁸⁴ Contrary to *Ibid.*, 511–12, the use of grammatical singulars rather than plurals does not constitute a particularly substantive argument for a ubiquitously individual mode of election. Where individuals are specifically named as being directly chosen, one can scarcely avoid this implication, but other grammatically singular constructions might, strictly speaking, refer to a group as though that group were a single, prototypical individual. Unless God's choice would penetrate to the individual components of this prototypical individual, however, the elective mode would, properly speaking, still only be corporate.

group. For instance, although the fact that the group simply existed seems to be the most significant point for Paul's argument when he cites the example, Paul's report of God's having selected 7000 individual men in the days of Elijah suggests a perspective in which these individually elected members constitute the group (Rom 11:2–4).⁸⁵

Yet, at precisely this point in his argument where Paul views in more detail a group that he elsewhere designates simply as a group (e.g., Rom 9:6–8, 25–27, 29; 10:12; 11:5, 7), Paul also involves, as members of the elect group, himself and the other believing Israelites with whom he stands as members of the elect group (Rom 11:1, 5).⁸⁶ In correlating group internality with elective individuality within that group, therefore, Rom 11:1–5 may particularly suggest a way of holding together individual and corporate language about election more faithfully than is sometimes done. For, election in Rom 9–11 is regularly *telic*—that is, God elects people in order to further the execution of his own will in salvation history (cf. Eph 1:3–14). Those through whom God executes his purpose are represented as having been individually chosen for that task, but Paul groups under corporate designations those whose roles in the execution of God's purposes need not command particular consideration at a given point, although Paul could presumably have spoken of other people in Israel's history as having been individually elected also (e.g., Moses, David; cf. Rom 9:4).⁸⁷

In Paul's own case, his appeal for the Israelites' non-rejection based on his own acceptance to God in Christ (Rom 11:1) really only works if his audience holds as legitimate Paul's perception of his own election. For, the audience *could* wholly disagree with this perception, or they could regard Paul as sincere but deluded at this point. In either of these cases, Paul's affirmation of his own election would contribute nothing to his argument.

⁸⁵ Contrary to *Ibid.*, 498, God's election of a remnant need not necessarily imply his election of the individuals within this remnant as individuals. Yet, Paul's specific citation of God's having chosen 7000 men (*ἑπτακισχίλιοι ἄνδρες*; Rom 11:4) does suggest that the divine word to Elijah conceived of these individuals as individuals rather than as the indefinite contents of an elect group.

⁸⁶ Cf. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 330–32.

⁸⁷ Cf. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans*, 166.

On what basis, however, could Paul's audience evaluate and validate this affirmation of his election? In particular, the reasonable conformity of Paul's teaching and practice to the truth that the Roman church had already perceived about the gospel presents itself as a viable option (Rom 1:8; cf. Acts 26:24).⁸⁸ Their experience with Paul through this epistle may have altered their validation structure in some small respects, but the key components, like the things that Paul details in Rom 1:2–6, seem already to have been firmly in place (Rom 1:8). Consequently, Paul's Roman audience would presumably have understood his claim to non-rejected status with reference to this standard.

Therefore, although Rom 9–11 primarily addresses theodicy rather than election and, as such, Paul does not detail the principle(s) by he would affirm individual election in cases other than the ones that he explicitly cites, one may suggest that he would also have been comfortable representing as individually elected others who were similarly, in some way, means through whom God would work to establish his purposes (cf. CD 2:12–13).⁸⁹ As in the case of Pharaoh, this election need not necessarily benefit the one chosen,⁹⁰ but when this election is united, on the part of the elect individual, *with faith like Abraham's*, this chosen, individual believer comes to inherit the blessing promised to Abraham and to provide a means through whom God works to extend that blessing to others also. Consequently, read retrospectively in the context of Paul's Roman audience, which was indeed experiencing the blessing promised to Abraham's seed (Rom 8:31–39), Paul's argument provides a basis for the community of those faithful to Jesus to affirm their own elect status and participation in the furtherance of God's plan for the gospel to reach to the ends of the earth, a plan whose execution Paul specifically hoped to pursue with the Roman church in the near future (Rom 1:8–15; 15:22–33).⁹¹

Similarly, the reading of Rom 9–11 suggested here would pose for the members of the modern church a telic view of themselves

⁸⁸ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3–42.

⁸⁹ Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: Augsburg Fortress, 1977), 446–47.

⁹⁰ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 501.

⁹¹ Cf. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 529–32; Michael Wolter, "Das Israelproblem nach Gal 4,21–31 und Röm 9–11," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107, no. 1 (2010): 1–30.

and their situation within the people of God. That is, to the degree that the church rightly confesses her own deliverance from rebellion against God and its consequences and affirms her own blessedness in the fellowship that she enjoys with God in Christ, Rom 9–11 would oblige the church to hold firmly to the faith that she professes and to construe her own situation in view of the purposes that God has beyond the constitution of the church as such. Indeed, this constitution may represent an intermediate goal, but faithfulness to the church's identity as the people that experiences the blessing of Abraham's God through the chief of Abraham's seed (cf. Gal 3:15–29) requires that the church diligently pursue envelopment within God's future purposes for the church and the world. For, by such envelopment, the church actualizes and makes effective the elect status that she confesses herself to possess for the benefit of herself and the world and for the glory of the God of all (cf. Rom 12–15; 2 Pet 1:3–11).



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