

## God's Sovereign Choice (Job 42:1-6 and Romans 9:1-6-29)

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### **Job 42:1-6**

Then Job replied to the LORD:

<sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things;

no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

<sup>3</sup> You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'

Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me to know.

<sup>4</sup> "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;

I will question you,  
and you shall answer me.'

<sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you

but now my eyes have seen you.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself

and repent in dust and ashes."

### **Romans 9:6-29**

#### **God's Sovereign Choice**

<sup>6</sup> It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. <sup>7</sup> Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." <sup>8</sup> In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. <sup>9</sup> For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

<sup>10</sup> Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

<sup>14</sup> What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

<sup>16</sup> It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup> For 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." <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

<sup>19</sup> One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" <sup>21</sup> Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

<sup>22</sup> What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup> What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— <sup>24</sup> even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? <sup>25</sup> As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;  
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

<sup>26</sup> and,

"In the very place where it was said to them,  
'You are not my people,'  
there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,  
only the remnant will be saved.

<sup>28</sup> For the Lord will carry out  
his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

<sup>29</sup> It is just as Isaiah said previously:

"Unless the Lord Almighty  
had left us descendants,  
we would have become like Sodom,  
we would have been like Gomorrah."

## Sermon: God's Sovereign Choice

Please have your Bibles opened at **Romans chapter 9** – starting at verse 6 – and we're going through to verse 29. There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

### Recap/Intro

#### **[Slide-Recap]**

Last week we saw the Apostle Paul had **great sorrow** and **unceasing anguish** because - **most of his fellow Jews had failed to recognize and believe in Jesus**, the Messiah.

In fact, **Paul was so upset by this** – he was prepared to be **cursed and cut off from Jesus** – **so his fellow Jews could be saved**.

In other words, **Paul was prepared to miss out on Heaven and wind up in Hell** – if it meant his fellow Jews were saved for Heaven! (pause)

In our passage this morning from chapter 9 – verses 6 to 29 – Paul goes on to explain - the reason why - **many of the Jews rejected Jesus**.

And it's all about – **God's Sovereign Choice or Election**

We'll look at Paul's explanation under **4 headings**: **[Slide-Headings]**

1. **God's Word never fails – He always keeps His promises** (vv6-13)
2. **God is not unjust** (vv14-18)
3. **Don't talk back to God** (vv19-21)
4. **God has a plan – there will always be a remnant** (v22-29)

## God's Word never fails - He always keeps His promises (vv6-13)

1<sup>st</sup> then – **God's Word never fails!** Look at verse 6.

*For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*

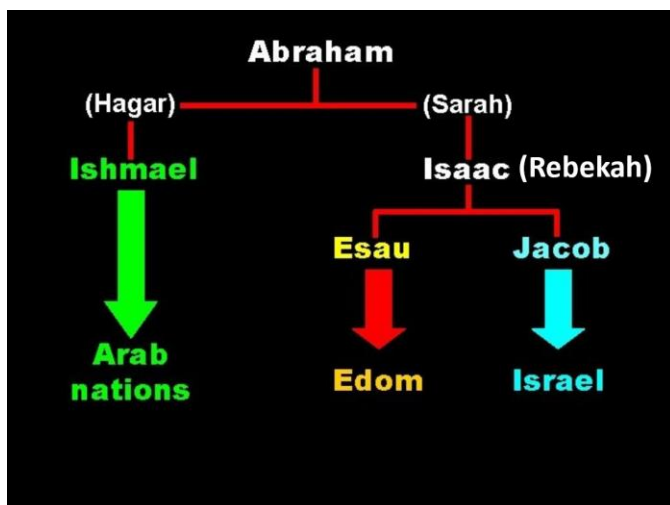
Paul's point is that from the time that the notion of the nation of Israel began – there's always been **two Israels**, those who were physical descendants of **Abraham** and those who were spiritual descendants of **Abraham**. And **God's blessings and promises** are to the spiritual descendants. [Same concept in chapter 2 – physical circumcision and circumcision of the heart!]

That's Paul's point in verses 7 to 9 – and he uses **Abraham and his wife Sarah** as an example.

[Slide-family tree]

God promised Abraham and Sarah - a son in their old age.

But Abraham and Sarah couldn't wait for God's promise to come about and they **took matters into their own hands**.



Sarah suggested that **Abraham** sleep with her maid-servant, **Hagar**, and he did and Hagar had a son called **Ishmael**.

But Ishmael was not the son that **God promised Abraham and Sarah**.

Finally, when Abraham (age 100) and Sarah (age 90), they did have the son God promised – his name was Isaac.

Paul's point is **God's promise of future blessings** was through the son Abraham had with Sarah; namely Isaac - and not through the son Abraham had with Hagar, namely Ishmael. **God's promise was made to Abraham and Sarah – not to Abraham and Hagar!**

So even from the start – '*not all who are descendant from Abraham are to be included in Israel*' – anyone from Ishmael's family line were excluded from God's promises made to Abraham! **Ishmael's descendants** became the **Arab nations**.

Paul then uses another example of how God's word and promises work in verses 10 to 13. **Isaac married Rebekah** and they had **twins Esau and Jacob**.

But Paul says – v11 - *before the twins were born*; and *before they had done anything good or bad*; God chose to bless Jacob the younger and not Esau the elder; and God chose that – v12 - *Esau the older would serve Jacob the younger* (Genesis 25:23) and – v13 - God *chose to love Jacob and hate* [in comparison] *Esau* (Malachi 1:2-3).

And God chose Jacob to become the nation of Israel and God chose Esau to become the nation of Edom! So again, we see - not all the descendants of Abraham are Israel

I'm sure we've all struggled with the way God chose Jacob over Esau?

There are **two main objections**:

**1<sup>st</sup> objection** - **why did God choose Jacob over Esau – and it appears to have nothing to do with their behaviour because Paul says the choice was made before they did anything good or bad?**

**Answer** - **our greatest error in considering God's election [choice] is to think that God chooses for arbitrary reasons, as if He made choices in a random way of choosing – like eeny, meeny, miney, moe. We may not understand God's reasons for choosing and they may be reasons He alone knows and answers to, but God's choices are not crazy, without reason, or random. They make perfect sense knowing everything God knows and seeing everything God sees.**

**All we do know** is that **Esau was dumb enough to give up his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew and God knew that he would – and we also know that Jacob was a shady and sneaky character at best!**

**As humans** **we are not privy to God's thought patterns and His ways are superior to our ways!**

**It's difficult for us to accept this teaching of God's sovereign [supreme ruler] election or choosing – and difficult to accept that - God chooses some and not others. But if we don't accept it – we then start to make His choice based on human efforts instead of God choosing based on His grace and mercy.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> objection** – how can God “*hate*” Esau?

**Answer:** Bible commentator **Leon Morris** makes the point that there are several examples in the Bible where “*hate*” clearly seems to mean something like “loved less” (Genesis 29:31-33 – *Leah was loved less than Rachel*, Deuteronomy 21:15 – *a*

*man loved one wife less than the other*, Matthew 6:24 – *we are to love wealth less than God*, Luke 14:26 – *we are to love family less than God*, and John 12:25 – *we are to love this world less to gain eternal life*).

Another way to see this is as Jean Calvin says – “***hate***” means “***rejected***” rather than “***accepted***”

But for me **Charles Spurgeon** nails it:

*A woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, ‘I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.’ ‘That,’ Spurgeon replied, ‘is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob’” (William Newell in his commentary on Romans).*

**[Slide-God’s word never fails]**

So, the bottom line is – **God’s Word never fails** – He always keeps His promises!

**God is not unjust (vv14-18)**

**[Slide-God is not unjust]**

This idea of God choosing some and not others – leads **Paul** - to ask a **rhetorical question** in verse 14 – “***Is God unjust?***”

The short answer Paul gives is “***not at all!***”

The longer answer is for Paul to go back to the Old Testament for yet another **example** – this time **Moses**.

See v15. Paul quotes **God talking to Moses** from Exodus 33:19 – where God says “***I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion***”.

In other words; as the Creator and sustainer of all things and because God is sovereign [supreme ruler], He can choose whom He has mercy on!

*Timothy Keller puts it this way: Mercy by its definition cannot ever be an obligation. To say that mercy is “unfair” is to say that mercy is owed to all. But the whole idea of mercy is that it is undeserved and free.*

*Paul’s argument is: if we say: it is unfair for God to only have mercy on some - it is a self-contradictory statement. Paul is reasoning: Are you saying that God owes anyone salvation? Of course not! And if God owes no-one salvation, then He is free to give to a) all people; or b) to some people; or c) to no people. Salvation is about God’s mercy and gift, not about our efforts or our rights!*

*John Stott says: the amazing thing is: not that some are saved and others are not; but that anybody is saved at all! For we deserve nothing at God’s hand but judgment. If we receive what we deserve (which is judgment), or if we receive what we do not deserve (which is mercy), in NEITHER case is God unjust.*

(pause)

The apostle Paul [as does this Paul] realizes this teaching is a difficult concept.

So, he gives another example in verses in verse 17 and 18.

This time the **example is the Pharaoh in Egypt** at the time that God told Moses to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and ask for the Israelites to be released and be allowed to leave Egypt. But Paul says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

Paul’s point is, God has mercy on whom he wants and He hardens the heart of whom He wants. God chose to harden Pharaoh’s heart to show His power in



sending the 10 plagues (see Exodus 7:3; 14:4, 17) which were a direct attack on the Egyptian gods to prove the Lord God is the one true God!

However, God's sovereignty works with human responsibility. If we read Exodus chapters 4-14, we see a fascinating picture. On the one hand God hardens Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:2; 7:3; 9:12, 17; 10:1, 20, 27) and yet on the other hand, we are told "*Pharaoh hardened his [own] heart*" (Exodus 8:15, 19, 32; 9:17, 34) and God tells Pharaoh that he is being punished because "*you...set yourself against my people*" (Exodus 9:13-18). Basically, it's just like Paul told us in Romans 1:24 – God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was "*giving him over*" to his own stubbornness. Pharaoh decided to resist God and God reinforced Pharaoh in that stance; and gave Pharaoh what he chose! God hardens those He wants to harden and all those he hardens - want to be hardened!

**God is NEVER unjust!**

Don't talk back to God (vv19-21)

**[Slide-Don't talk back]**

Again, Paul sees a potential problem with God having mercy on some and hardening others. Look at v19 – Paul raises another rhetorical question: "*Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?*"

And we're probably not going to like the answer?

It's the same answer - Job got - when he battled with losing everything precious in his life.

See v20 - *Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?*

I'm sure we've all complained to God – and said things like:

*'why does this always happen to me – it's not fair?'*

*'why did you make me so sensitive?'*

*'why did you make me – too short, too tall, too thin or too fat?'*

But God says *"I am the creator – you're the creature – and you're not in the position to talk back to me on this stuff – yes, you can grizzle and complain to me if you like – but I'm God – and I know things you don't know and I know what my plans and purposes are – and you don't – so 'pull your head in' – or as my great Aunt Lizzie would say "Don't be impudent, Paul!"*

**We must beware of standing in judgment over God, rather than remembering that God is judge over us.**

Again, **Paul**, perhaps worried we're not getting this teaching – gives another example in v21 – **God is the master potter – and - out of the same lump and clay – he can fashion - a fancy vase to hold flowers or a plain old pot to cook lentil stew!**

We must all beware of - **recreating God** in a way that is more pleasant or palatable, rather than acknowledging that He is our Creator. He is the divine Potter; we are human clay

As we look around our church family – **we’re all different shapes and sizes** – with **different personalities** and **have different talents** – and they all work together as the body of Christ – **to bring glory to God.**

**God knows what He’s doing** – Paul says – **don’t backchat Him!** (pause)

**God has a plan – there will always be a Remnant (v22-29)**

Which bring us to Paul’s final point in his teaching in this passage – in verses 22 to 29 – and that is ***God has a plan!***

**[Slide-God has a plan]**

Look at v22 – the way God works is that – **He chooses to show His wrath (anger) and make His power known** – by bearing with the people He is angry with – with great patience – even though they are done for. A great example of this – and I believe that’s what Paul’s alluding to – is the way **God dealt patiently with Pharaoh by sending 10 plagues** – when He could have wiped Pharaoh and the Egyptians out in one hit!

But the reason God showed patience – is in v23 – **so that He could make the riches of His glory known to those whom He was going to show mercy to** – namely the Israelites - **whom He rescued from slavery and brought to the Promised Land.** All the plagues were **designed to not only** show Egypt who the **one true God is** but also **to show Israel they can trust God** – He is their God and keeps His promises!

Paul’s point is **God always has a plan**

V24 – God has a plan for the people Paul is writing to – the church in Rome – which is not only made up of Jewish Christians but Gentile Christians – and it's always been God's plan for His faithful people to comprise of Jews and Gentiles.

And if we haven't had enough examples yet – Paul gives another in vv25-26.

Paul quotes from the book of **Hosea**.

V25 – God has always said He has the right to choose and to “call people ‘my people’ who are not my people; and to call someone ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one”.

And likewise – v26 – God always has the right to choose and to say “in the very place where it was said to them, ‘you are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God’.

Paul is using what Hosea says as a template for what God is now doing for the Gentiles. Paul is saying to the Jews: You know God has always been the God who blesses those who do not deserve it and could not have predicted it. If the Gentiles are flocking to become Christians now, should that really surprise you, Jews?

Paul makes one final point and example in verses 27 to 29.

Here **Paul quotes from Isaiah 10:22-23 which talks about God working to save a remnant from the pending Assyrian invasion and destruction.** The suffering of God's people at the hands of the Assyrians and others would make them feel as if they would certainly all be destroyed. God assures them that this is not the case. He will always preserve His remnant.

Paul also quotes from Isaiah 1:9 who makes the point that **the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were both totally destroyed** (Genesis 19:24-29). It was only God's mercy on a remnant from Judah that prevented the whole of Israel from being destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah!

Paul's overall point is that throughout God's dealing with the nation of Israel; when they deserved to be totally destroyed; **God showed mercy to the tribe of Judah** and left a **remnant**. And there will always be a **remnant**!

### Conclusion and Response

I expect we will all struggle with this teaching of God's Sovereign Election  
(Choice)?

#### **[Slide-Conclusion]**

But before we question God on this – let's take home these truths:

1. Can we take on board what Paul says in Romans 9:20 – *who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?*
2. Can we take on board what Job concluded in Job 42:2 – *I know you [God] can do all things, no purpose of yours can be thwarted!*
3. Can we be honest about our questioning/complaining/objections to God -  
and join Job and say as he does in Job 42:3 – *Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, too wonderful for me to know!*

#### **[Slide-Response]**

And our response this morning

1<sup>st</sup> – Forever, **thank God for his sovereign choice in choosing us to be in Christ and children of God!**

2<sup>nd</sup> – Before we use the fact that - God chooses whom He will have mercy upon – as an excuse - for NOT telling people about Jesus

a) WE don't know - **whom God has chosen** and

b) God's plan is to use us (Jesus' Church) as the vehicle to CALL those He has CHOSEN. So, we can't ignore Jesus' command – to go and make disciples of Jesus! (Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15)

Let's pray...

*Heavenly Father, as much as your sovereign choice is difficult for us to accept; help us to trust that your ways are higher than our ways – and your thoughts higher than our thoughts.*

*Thank you that in Jesus, you have chosen us to be your children – saved for Heaven. Help us to submit to your will and not our own will.*

*Help us to be obedient in making disciples of Jesus – and calling those you have chosen – to come and follow Jesus!*

*In His name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Benediction (Isaiah 46:10)**

*I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' Amen.*