

- One is voluntary. Pharaoh wanted nothing to do with God... He rejected God's revelation. The hardening of Pharaoh's own heart refers to the resolve in Pharaoh's heart to keep the Israelites as his slaves. We should not think that God coerced or caused an unwilling, kind-hearted Pharaoh to be hard towards God and Israel. Pharaoh was not an innocent or godly man. He was a brutal dictator overseeing the terrible oppression of the Israelites.
- The other meaning of hardening is 'to make strong, to make firm.' God never forced Pharaoh to resist against his will; having demonstrated his own obstinacy and desire to resist, God simply hardened him (make firm) that he might continue his resistance until God's own purposes were fulfilled. In hardening the heart of Pharaoh, God simply allowed Pharaoh's heart to pursue its natural inclination (cf 1:24, 26, and 28). God did not exert a positive evil influence on the mind of Pharaoh; for, in all this, the king acted freely. God is not the author of evil or sin (Hab 1:13; 1 John 1:5), but God is the author of a master plan that includes evil and includes sin. The Bible has many examples of God using evil people and even Satan himself to accomplish His sovereign purpose & for His glory (Prov 16:4).
- The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility:
 - Judas' betrayal of Christ (Matt 26:24) & the crucifixion of Jesus by men accomplish the purpose of God (Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28).
 - In 2 Samuel 24:1-2,10, God incited David to number the men of Israel & Judah, and yet we find that David sinned by doing this numbering. In the parallel account, the writer of 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that it was Satan who moved David to take the census. If we put the two accounts together, we see that Satan was the one who instigated the evil and God allowed it to happen. Nothing happens that God does not want to happen. If it happens, then God is content for it to happen.
- God is free in dispensing His sovereign mercy as He desires, and God is free to leave others in their own sin and hardening them in the sin that they have chosen. God does whatever He pleases (Ps 115:3; Matt 20:1-16). Lessons:
 - God is sovereign in His dealings with sinful men.
 - This truth should humble our hearts before God. God would have been perfectly just if He had left us as we were, but God chose to exercise mercy.
 - The truth of the sovereignty of God in our salvation should bolster our faith and confidence in Him (Phil 1:6).

(ii) *Objection 2: How Can I Be Held Responsible? 9:19-24*

- The second objection: "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" If it is all a matter of God's sovereign choice, why does God hold men responsible for their actions? The objection is founded on ignorance of the true relations between God and His sinful creatures. We who have been created have no right to question our Creator.

God's Sovereign Choice (9:1-29)

- Romans 9-11 address a problem which was quite perplexing in Paul's day: Israel's rejection of her Messiah & the gospel (and the salvation of the Gentiles). God is not done with Israel. The Jews are still God's chosen people, and He still has a plan to incorporate salvation in and through Israel. Paul emphasizes 2 key doctrines: (i) the sovereignty of God in election; (ii) the uniqueness of the nation of Israel in God's plan.
- In Romans 9:1-29, Paul shows that the Jewish rejection of the gospel is not a failure of God's promise to Israel, for the promise was only for Abraham's descendants whom God had chosen unto salvation.

1. Paul's Anguish over Israel (9:1-5)

- Paul testifies to the great heaviness and continual sorrow of his heart concerning Israel. In fact, Paul wishes that he were accursed from Christ if this could mean salvation for his fellow Jews (cf Exo 32:31-32). Paul cared deeply about the salvation of his lost kinsmen, the Jews.
- The name "Israel" was bestowed upon Jacob by God, whose name God changed when Jacob wrestled with Him. Paul lists 8 privileges that God gave to Israel.
 - Israel was God's adopted nation (Exo 4:22; Deut 7:6). God chose Israel.
 - The glory speaks of God's shekinah glory, the visible "cloud of glory," the symbol of the divine presence that attended the children of Israel in the wilderness.
 - God made special covenants with them via Abraham, Moses & David.
 - God gave Israel the Law; He revealed Himself through the Scriptures.
 - Israel received God's pattern of temple service so that they could approach and worship Him.
 - God made many incredible promises to the nation of Israel.
 - The Israelites have been honoured with so illustrious an ancestry - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & also David.
 - Jesus the Messiah was born a Jew. He is the pinnacle of all the promises, the ultimate revelation that God gave to the Jewish nation.

Israel had all these privileges. Yet she rejected her Messiah! Great spiritual privileges will not save anyone unless we respond to these privileges.

- V5 encapsulates both the humanity ("*as concerning the flesh*") and deity ("*who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*") of Christ.

2. God's Sovereign Choice (9:6-13)

- Listing these privileges immediately raises this question: Has God abandoned Israel? Has God's Word failed? No! Everything that was said in the OT, specifically about the future salvation of Israel, is going according to God's eternal purpose & plan (Ps 119:89; Num 23:19).

- God's word has not failed because God has never promised to save the entire Jewish nation. V6b - For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel. Not all the descendants of Israel (Jacob) are Jews in the scriptural sense of the term (cf 2:28-29). God's promise to save Abraham's descendants was limited in scope. Within physical Israel there is a smaller Israel that is the true Israel - the believing Jews/remnant (v27). Rejection by the majority does not negate God's promise to the minority. 2 historical illustrations:
 - Though both Ishamel and Isaac were Abraham's sons, the former was rejected, and the latter chosen by God to share in the promise made to Abraham. God chose Isaac as the son of promise (cf Gen 22:2,12,16). "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*" - Paul quotes Genesis 21:12 where God promised to build a nation called by Him through Isaac. This implies a selection, or choice; and, therefore, the doctrine of election is illustrated in the history of the very commencement of the nation of Israel.
 - As in the case of Isaac, God also made a definite choice between Esau and Jacob. Jacob was to have the priority, the promised land, the promises, and the honour of being regarded as the chosen of God. God's choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau was announced to Rebecca before the twins were born, before they had done anything good or bad, so that all might know that God's choice had nothing to do with anything in them, foreseen or otherwise.
- God did what He did so that His purpose in election "*might stand*." God operates on the basis of divine election. He makes a sovereign choice; He is absolutely free to do as He wishes. It is "*not of works, but of him that calleth*." The call brings into effect the result of God's choice and purpose. God's choice of who will be saved is not determined by man's actions but rests solely in Himself.
- Not only was the blessing of Jacob over Esau determined before birth, but it also involved a reversal of the norm - "*the elder shall serve the younger*" - further emphasizing the sovereignty of God. The quotation from Genesis 25:23 shows that this has reference particularly to the posterity of Jacob & Esau. The sense is that the descendants of Esau, who were Edomites, should be inferior to, and subject to the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites. In v13 when Paul cites Malachi 1:2-3, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*" Paul is speaking about national election. Paul was writing about the descendants of Jacob and Esau who had developed into nations, the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom that hated the Jews and God. In response to their sinful actions, Esau's descendants brought God's curse upon themselves (Gen 12:3). Indeed, God's terrible judgment on Edom was announced through the prophet Obadiah and confirmed by the prophet Malachi. Edom as a nation no longer exists.
- God has always accomplished His purpose. The Word of God has not failed even in Paul's day in the 1st century when Israel crucified their Messiah and rejected Him, and the gospel then went to the Gentiles. God kept His Word because God never promised to save every Jew.

3. The Defense of God's Sovereign Choice (9:14-24)

- The doctrine of election is 1 of the most difficult and controversial doctrines to understand and joyfully submit. When God saves someone, it has absolutely nothing to do with anything good in that person. Rather, it depends totally on God's purpose according to His sovereign choice.
 - (i) *Objection 1: Is God Fair? 9:14-18*
 - The 1st objection: "*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?*" The natural human response is, "But that's not fair!" Is God unrighteous or unfair to choose some and not others? Paul's steadfast response: God forbid! By virtue of who He is, God cannot possibly be unjust (Gen 18:25). God does not owe salvation to anyone. So, if God grants salvation to any person or pass over someone, He is not being unjust or unfair. Every one of us deserves condemnation. Salvation is God giving to us what we do not deserve. The objection is founded on ignorance – that God is under obligation to extend grace to all, whereas He is under obligation to none. 2 examples:
 - Moses. Paul cites Exodus 33:19 to explain why God is not unjust. The whole nation deserved to be destroyed, yet God killed only 3,000 Israelites not because they were more wicked or less godly, but purely because of His grace and mercy. God is free to bestow mercy and compassion upon whomever He so desires because no one can lay a claim to His mercy and compassion. Rather than asking, "Why not everyone?" we should ask, "Why me?" Salvation does not depend on the man's will or actions. It does not depend on the man who wills because no man wills to believe in Jesus Christ on his own. We only will to believe when God changes our will to receive the gospel message (Acts 16:14). Salvation depends on God who has shown mercy (Jn 1:12-13). God operates on the basis of divine election. If we are saved, it is because God chooses to show mercy on us.
 - Pharaoh. Paul addresses those not chosen for salvation (cf Exo 9:16). God has divine design for everything in the entire universe, even those who are passed over. Pharaoh was only Pharaoh because God had placed him there for His purpose. God raised Pharaoh up to be the object of His wrath and judgment to demonstrate His own glory & power (Ex 7:5, 9:16, 10:2, 11:9, 14:4).
 - In Moses' case, mercy was shown; in Pharaoh's case, no mercy was shown. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart has been the subject of much controversy. Hardening of the heart is ascribed to:
 - God in Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27; 14:4; 14:8.
 - Pharaoh in Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34.
 - God hardened Pharaoh's heart + Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Divine-hardening and self-hardening are interwoven. Both are true – one is personal; the other is sovereign. There are two sides to how this hardening works: