

Romans 9 Overview

Bob Warren

Romans 9:1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

Paul told the truth as he taught God's Word, meaning that he never lied. He was straightforward and honest regarding what he believed, never winning over the listener by means of stealth—even should it cost him the friendship (Galatians 4:16). As a result, he lived with a clear conscience as he carried the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 24:16).

Romans 9:2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

Paul's heart was broken over the spiritual apathy within his people, the Jews.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

Paul didn't believe he could lose his salvation, but he would have gladly subjected himself to Hell had it meant that his "kinsmen" (the Jews) would find Christ. What love!

Romans 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

The Jews had a tremendous advantage over the Gentiles in that they had received "the adoption as sons" through having become Jehovah's "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22-23; Jeremiah 31:9). Their "firstborn" status, however, did not grant them passage to heaven. They, like the Gentiles, were required to repent and believe while depraved before salvation was granted. The Jews had also seen God's "glory" (during the wilderness wanderings), received His "covenants" (the Abrahamic, Davidic, Palestinian, and New Covenants), along with "the Law." They had also received "the promises" regarding the Messiah.

Romans 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

"The fathers" of Romans 9:5 are the "fathers" of the Jewish nation, the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—of whom Paul writes more extensively in Romans 9:6-13, "and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh" (Romans 9:5).

Jesus, "who is over all" (sovereign), was born a Jew, and is "God blessed forever"—meaning that we, as part of His body, will be blessed forever.

Romans 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

Paul emphasizes that although national Israel has failed, God's "word" has not "failed." In fact, God's purpose in choosing national Israel to office (not destiny) has resulted in blessings which will continue throughout eternity future. The fact that the unredeemed Jews perceived all Jews as having been chosen to salvation (destiny) prior to physical birth (due to being part of God's chosen nation) kept them from believing that they needed to repent and believe to be saved. They failed to understand that God could choose a nation to perform a certain function (like bringing the Messiah into the world and taking the news of His coming to the Gentiles) without saving all persons within the nation.

Paul emphasizes in verse 6 that two Israels exist: (1) Physical Israel, made up of all descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2) Spiritual Israel, "the Israel of God" of Galatians 6:16, known as the remnant—made up of believers within physical Israel.

Romans 9:7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

The true (spiritual) descendants of Abraham within physical Israel are the Jews who exercise faith in Christ. These Jews are the "children" of God.

"Isaac," whose half-brother was Ishmael, is mentioned in verse 7. Paul is bringing to mind that the "seed" of Genesis 3:15, Jesus the Messiah (Galatians 3:16), would be born to Abraham through Isaac's lineage rather than Ishmael's.

Romans 9:8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Paul stresses that Ishmael, born through Hagar (as a result of Abraham and Sarah's self-effort, or works), "was born according to the flesh" (Galatians 4:23) while Isaac, born through Sarah, was according to "the promise" (Galatians 4:23). Paul follows by writing that New Testament believers "are children of promise" (Galatians 4:28). How can this statement be valid? Not only did God promise Abraham that Isaac would be born in his lineage; He promised that the "seed" of Genesis 21:12 (KJV) [and Romans 9:7b (KJV)] would also be born in his (Abraham's) lineage. This "seed is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). Thus, we "are children of promise" (Galatians 4:28) due to having been placed "in" (1Corinthians 12:13; 2Corinthians 5:17) the promised "seed," Who "is Christ" (Galatians 3:16), the moment we repented and believed while depraved.

Romans 9:9 For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

Isaac was the child promised to Abraham and Sarah through whose lineage the promised Messiah would be born. We, therefore, became children of promise the moment we were placed in the promised Messiah—subsequent to repenting and believing while depraved.

Romans 9:10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;

The "twins" mentioned in this passage are Jacob and Esau. Yet by mentioning them, Paul is actually referencing two nations, as verified by Genesis 25:23 where God spoke to Rebekah:

*"Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body;
And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."*

By using the phrases, "Two nations," "two peoples," and "one people" in Genesis 25:23, God confirms that He is speaking of nations (Israel and Edom)—not individuals (Jacob and Esau). Thus, God would bring the Messiah into the world through the nation of Israel (Jacob's descendants), not through the Edomites (Esau's descendants)

Romans 9:11 for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls,

Paul confirms that God's "choice" of Jacob (Israel) over Esau (the Edomites) as the nation through which the Messiah would be born was made while both Jacob and Esau were in their mother's womb.

Romans 9:12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

This verse further confirms that Paul is addressing nations rather than individuals, for Esau (the "older" brother) never served Jacob (the "younger" brother). However, Esau's descendants, the Edomite nation, consistently served Jacob's descendants, the nation of Israel.

Romans 9:13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

God, speaking through Malachi to the Jewish nation long after (hundreds of years after) He had spoken to Rebekah in Genesis 25:23, is not saying that He "hated" Esau the individual. Esau was dead by now. God "hated" Esau's descendants, the Edomite nation—the word "hated" meaning to "love less" based on the context of passages such as Genesis 29:30-31 KJV, Luke 14:26, Matthew 10:37-38. This truth lines up perfectly with the full counsel of God's Word, for God would naturally love Israel more than the Edomites due to having married Israel in Exodus 24.

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

Paul's unbelieving Jewish opponents viewed themselves as having been chosen to salvation prior to birth due to their Jewish heritage. Thus, their salvation, in their minds at least, was secure. However, they perceived themselves as remaining on the earth only so long as their deeds were insufficient to get them to heaven. Thus, based on their theology, God would be "unjust" should He accept those who exercise faith (do not work for their salvation) over those who labor under the Law.

Paul's Jewish critics disagreed with Paul, accusing God of "injustice" should He accept only a portion of the Jews rather than all—a mindset that resulted from their viewing Israel (the entire nation) as having been chosen to destiny rather than to office. Interestingly, these ill-informed Jewish critics got one thing right: If God's choice should determine where Jews spend eternity, He would be totally unjust had He chosen a few to be saved when He was capable of choosing all.

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

Israel sinned with the golden calf in Exodus 32, yet Moses desired that God dwell within the camp (among the people). Had God done so, the nation would have been consumed (Exodus 33:5). Thus, God displayed mercy and compassion (Romans 9:15) toward a sinful people by staying away—appearing to Moses instead, with His glory entering the camp on Moses' face.

Romans 9:16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Moses' "will" was that God dwell in the midst of Israel, an unwise choice indeed. God's "mercy" prevailed in that His glory entered the camp on Moses' face. Therefore, the result was not dependent upon what "man" (Moses in this instance) willed, "but on God who has mercy."

Romans 9:17 and 18 will be studied as a block rather than separately.

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

Romans 9:18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

"Hardens" can be interpreted "strengthened." Thus, God strengthened Pharaoh as he (Pharaoh) made unwise choices by means of his free will. Yet, God's will was done in spite of Pharaoh's evil choices—proving God sovereign indeed.

Romans 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

Paul's Jewish critic falsely accused him of teaching that God's sovereignty prevented man from resisting His will (Romans 9:19). Thus, the critic accused Paul of advocating that man lacks the freedom of choice. The critic, therefore, misrepresented Paul's words of Romans 9:6-18, the context of which validates the free will of man. Again we see that when a theological system is proven invalid by means of Scripture alone, many times the proponents of the unacceptable system twist the theology of the person who has proved them wrong.

Romans 9:20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

In answering "back to God" (in a negative sense—or replying against God), Paul's Jewish critic was resisting God's will. His answering back, therefore, proved that God's will can be resisted by man—be he Jew or Gentile (Luke 7:30).

Paul was bursting his critic's proverbial bubble. He taught that God was greatly using the Jewish nation to accomplish His strategy without predetermining the salvation of a single person who made up the nation.

As “*the potter*” (Isaiah 45:9) decides which pot will have “*hands*” (handles), God decides which nations will have special privileges as He maps out His strategy for man (as was the case with Cyrus and the Persians in Isaiah 44 and 45). Yet, His strategy never removes man’s free will.

Paul’s Jewish critic would have probably been familiar with Jeremiah 18:1-12, where Jeremiah speaks of the potter who was fashioning a vessel of clay only to have it spoil in his hand. The potter then proceeded to take the same clay and make it into a different vessel.

Let’s take Romans 9:21-23 through Diagram 13 to add flavor to Paul’s words in Romans 9:20:

Romans 9:21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?

God, according to Jeremiah 18:1-6 and Romans 9:20-21, reshaped the nation of Israel (a “*vessel*” according to Jeremiah 18:4; a “*lump*” according to Romans 9:21) into two vessels:

- (1) A “*vessel for honorable use,*” or “*honor*” (Romans 9:21)
- (2) A vessel “*for common use,*” “*no honor*” or “*dishonor*” (Romans 9:21)

Romans 9:22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

“*Prepared for destruction*” is in the middle voice in the Greek (rather than the passive), meaning that the “*vessels of wrath*” (who are born “*children of wrath*”—Ephesians 2:3) fit themselves for destruction. The context of the passages that both precede and follow this verse also verify the middle voice. Thus, their own choices not only prepare them for “*destruction,*” but cause them to remain “*vessels of wrath*”—their state since conception. The “*vessels of wrath*” (plural) make up the (singular) “*vessel for no honor,*” which dishonors God.

Romans 9:23 And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

The “*vessels of mercy*” (plural), who are born “*children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:3), become “*vessels of mercy*” once they choose to repent and believe while depraved. These vessels (plural) make up the (singular) “*vessel for honor,*” the portion of the nation of Israel that brings honor to God.

Romans 9:24 even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Paul confirms that even Gentiles become vessels of mercy (yet, not part of physical Israel, of course) once they repent and believe while depraved.

Romans 9:25 As He says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'"

Hosea, a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, was instructed by God to marry Gomer, a harlot. Their relationship would demonstrate Israel's unfaithfulness to her husband, Jehovah. Hosea and Gomer had three children: (1) "Jezreel," meaning both "God scatters" and "God sows" (2) "Lo-ruhamah," meaning "no mercy" (3) "Lo-ammi," meaning, "not my people." Gomer played the harlot but eventually returned to Hosea, just as the nation of Israel will return to Jehovah at the end of the Tribulation. When Israel returns, God will call her "Ammi," "My people" (Romans 9:25), instead of "Lo-ammi," "not my people," and she will remain faithful to Him forever.

Romans 9:26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, ' YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.'"

When the nation of Israel returns to Jehovah at the end of the Tribulation, she will inhabit "the place," or land, from which she departed—the holy land. Only then will she control and inhabit the entirety of the land originally promised to her in Genesis 15:18.

I make the next statement with extreme caution, realizing how easily it could be misconstrued. Paul, in referencing verses from Hosea in Romans 9:25-26, validates that through accepting Jesus as Savior, Gentiles become "beloved...sons" just like the believing Jews. In fact, both Jews and Gentiles become "vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:23-24) through faith in Christ. This, by no stretch of the imagination, means that Paul quoted Hosea out of context, a book that deals with Jehovah's dealings with the nation of Israel. Paul's point is that the Gentiles were once "not God's people," but during the church age, which began in Acts 2, Gentiles are becoming "sons of the living God" as never before. The context of the book of Hosea will not be fulfilled until the Jewish nation returns to Jehovah at the end of the Tribulation.

The doctrine of "the remnant" is discussed in Romans 9:27-29.

Romans 9:27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED;

Romans 9:28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."

Romans 9:29 And just as Isaiah foretold, "EXCEPT THE LORD OF SABAOOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME AS SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

A believing Jewish "remnant" (Romans 9:27) has always existed—even during the darkest days of Israel's sinful past. In fact, had there been a time when Jewish believers were nonexistent, the nation "would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah" (Romans 9:29). She would have become extinct.

Romans 9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;

Paul stresses that a portion of the Gentiles, who were part of a people never obsessed with appeasing God through the works of the Law, had “attained” the “righteousness” that Israel had pursued through the Law, yet failed to obtain.

Romans 9:31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.

The “Law” was given to reveal our need for a Savior (Galatians 3:24), not as a means to obtain righteousness before our Maker (Romans 3:20).

Romans 9:32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,

Notice that Paul contrasts “faith” with “works” in this passage. Therefore, for the depraved to exercise faith is not a work. As a result of misunderstanding the purpose of the Law, the Jews “stumbled over the stumbling stone,” Who is Jesus Christ. Romans 9:33 validates this truth.

Romans 9:33 just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

God requires faith in Christ, the “seed” of Genesis 3:15, before granting salvation. The “stone” that was laid “in Zion,” “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense,” is Jesus. No wonder, Jesus is so offensive to those who pursue righteousness through the works of the Law.

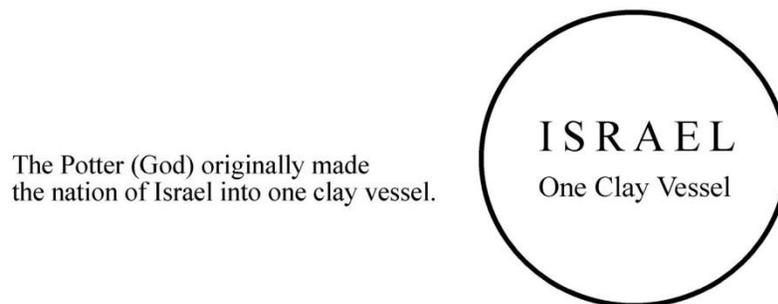
No one who believes in Christ will “be disappointed.” We need to remember this truth during seasons when it “seems” a though God has forsaken us. And yes, those seasons will come. They bear tremendous fruit in the end, however, allowing us to view life from God’s perspective to an ever-increasing degree. As a great man once said, “Everything is learned through pain, everything else is just information” (source unknown). To God be the glory!

Diagram 2

Jeremiah 18:1-6; Romans 9:20-21

Jeremiah 18:1-6 1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I shall announce My words to you." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. 4 But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 6 "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.

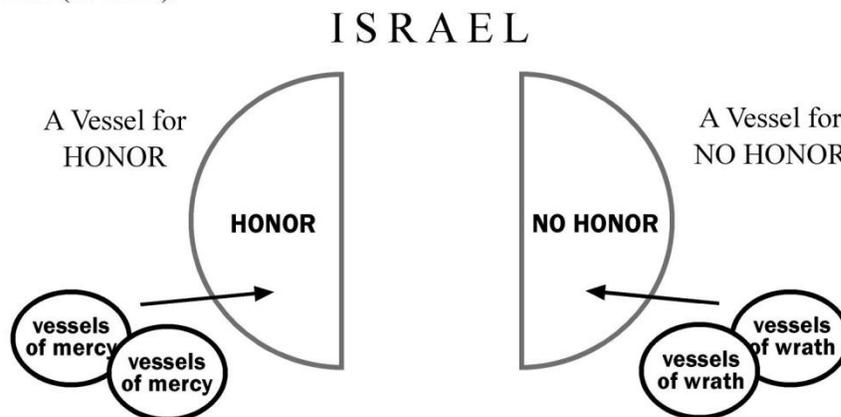
Romans 9:20-21 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?



Romans 9:21

Romans 9:21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?

The Potter (God), due to Israel's unbelief and resulting disobedience, made Israel, originally one clay vessel, into two clay vessels. (1) One vessel, a vessel for honorable use (for honor). (2) Another vessel, a vessel for common use (no honor).



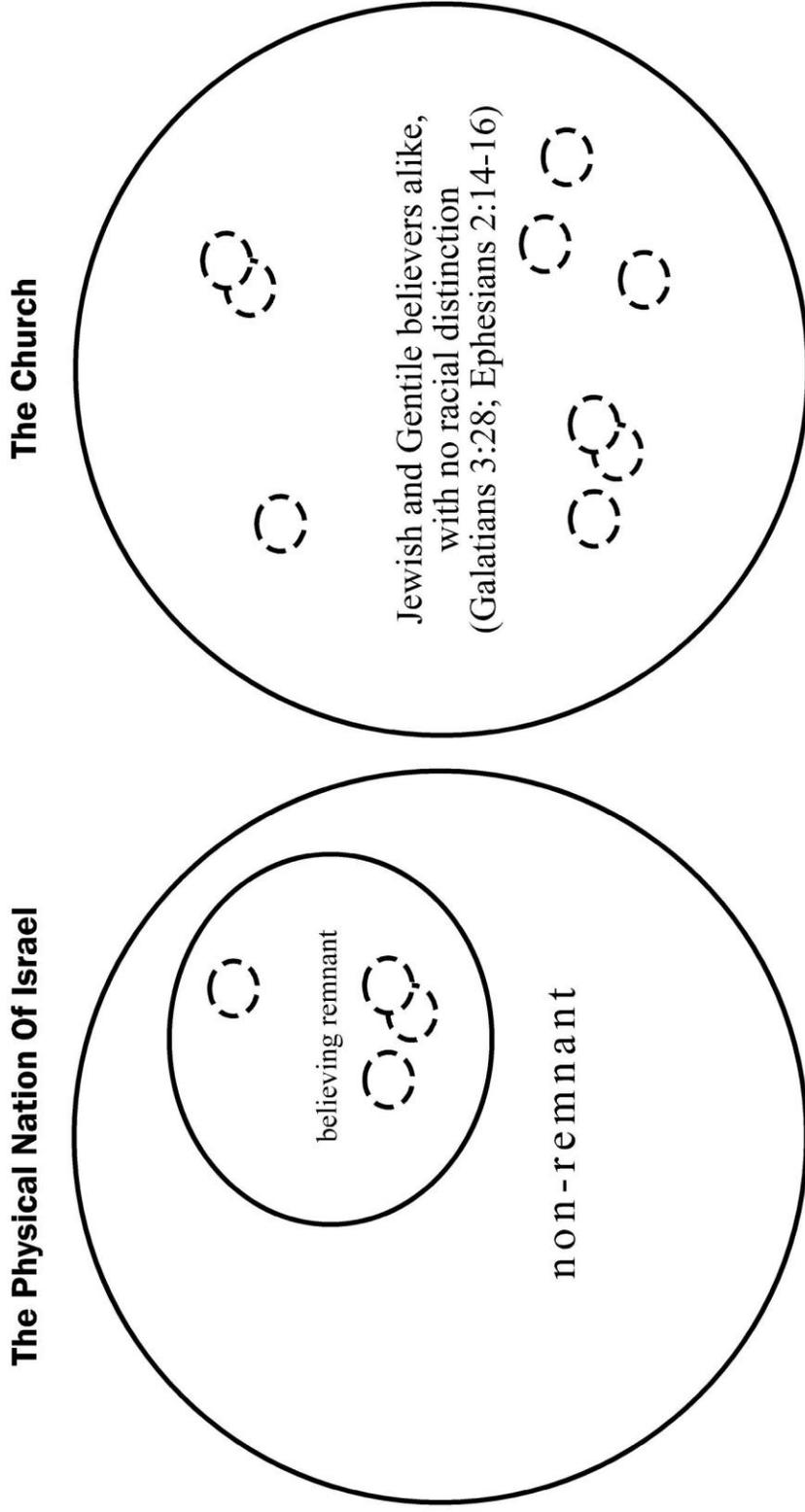
The vessel for honor, one of two vessels within the nation of Israel, is made up of individuals who receive God's mercy due to their choice of faith. These individuals are called vessels of mercy. They bring honor to God.

The vessel for no honor, one of two vessels within the nation of Israel, is made up of individuals who receive God's wrath due to their choice of unbelief. These individuals are called vessels of wrath. They bring no honor to God.

Many Calvinists, especially extreme and hyper (Reformed Theology), argue that all the vessels addressed in Romans 9:21-23 point to individuals in an attempt to credit Paul with teaching their view of unconditional election. These verses teach otherwise, with the vessel for honor and the vessel for no honor pointing to the division of the nation of Israel into two vessels. The vessels of mercy (believers) and the vessels of wrath (unbelievers) point to individuals within the nation who are part of either the vessel for honor or the vessel for no honor.

This diagram applies to any nation, for the basic lump from which a nation is formed will either be strengthened or divided depending on the moral response of the people who make up the nation.

Diagram 3



The believing remnant of the physical nation of Israel is not only part of the physical Jewish nation, that God entered into covenant with in the Old Testament, but also part of the church, which is not a nation (Romans 10:19; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-16). The fact that the believing remnant of the physical nation of Israel is part of the church does not mean that God is no longer committed to fulfilling the unconditional covenants previously granted to the physical Jewish nation. Therefore, the church has not replaced the physical nation of Israel as God's chosen people.