



# THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

PART 1

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What is the proper understanding of the term, "the elect"? There are some who would argue that "the elect" refers to a predetermined group of people that HaShem has chosen from before the creation of the world to be redeemed and thereby be in the Kingdom. Does this mean that those who are not elected by G-d are condemned and will experience eternal damnation? Is there any aspect of free will or has it all been predetermined by G-d and it is simply played out over time?

This doctrine of election has divided believers for centuries and I doubt that anyone today can add something to the debate that has not already been said many times before by many different individuals. So why write on this subject? Over the last decade there is a resurgence of Reformed theology within the evangelical movement. This has very significant implications in regard to one's view concerning Israel and the Jewish people in general. These implications are not just theological, but carry over into shaping political stances as well.

This article will examine the Biblical word "to elect" and many of the Scriptural verses where this word appears, in order to gain a proper Biblical understanding of the word, apart from all theological biases. Then the article will move toward an exegetically based presentation of the doctrine of election. The article will conclude with a look at how an improper understanding of election distorts one's views of Israel.

The term "to elect"

When examining the term "to elect" in the Bible, the word which forms the basis for this concept, is simply "to choose". Hence, G-d chooses individuals to be part of His Kingdom. These individuals are known as "the elect". In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul reveals that the elect were chosen in the Messiah before the foundations of the world (See Eph. 1:4). Obviously, HaShem knew in eternity past who would be in the Kingdom and who would be eternally separated from Him. However, the verse in question here does not state this point; that is, it is exegetically incorrect to use this verse to prove that G-d has chosen certain individuals for His Kingdom and others for eternal condemnation. What Ephesians 1:4 states is that before the foundations of the earth were laid; G-d chose those who are in Messiah, to be holy and blameless before Him in love. Therefore, although HaShem forever knew who would be saved and those who would not, Ephesians 1:4 does not make this statement. Rather this verse points out what all believers will become in Messiah.

It is very important for the reader to pay close attention to the context of this section. In the previous verse Paul is speaking about all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Messiah. After informing that G-d has chosen those who are in Messiah to be holy and blameless, it is most significant that in the next verse, Paul begins teaching about predestination. Once again it is vital to understand what is being said and what is not being said. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul writes that G-d has predestinated believers unto the adoption of sons. Many translations use a neuter designation, i.e. adoption of children. It is very important to note that the Greek word for adoption is actually formed from the word "son". The masculine is used to connote the idea of an heir. That is to say that G-d has predetermined that believers will be considered as heirs with Messiah Yeshua. In no way should one derive from this verse or the term "predestination" that

G-d has predetermined who would be heirs. Obviously HaShem from eternity past knew who would be heirs, but the idea of Him predetermining the "who", is not the intent of this verse.

Still further in this same chapter Paul writes that those in Messiah have an inheritance and then reveals what this inheritance is— being predestinated to become the praise of His glory that first trusted in Messiah (See Ephesians 1:10-12). Once again the idea is not who has been predetermined, but what has been predetermined, namely that believers who have trusted in the Gospel will one day become a praise to G-d. Hence predestination is not who will be saved, but that G-d has predetermined what believers will become. This idea is also expressed in Romans 8:28-30.

In this famous passage Paul begins with a promise. He writes,

"But we know that for the ones who love G-d, all works together for good, for the ones according to purpose (predetermination) are called." Romans 8:28

I translated the Greek in the most literal way possible so as to not place upon the verse any interpretation. Having translated it, now let us begin to understand what is actually said. The verse opens by stating that the verse is not speaking to all people in a general manner, but only to those who love HaShem. Only those who love HaShem can expect that all which takes place in their life will actually work together for good. It is the next section that at first glance appears somewhat confusing. In this section Paul speaks about those who are "called". Special attention will be given to this term later on in this article. But let it suffice to say that the "called" are those who G-d has invited into His Kingdom by means of the Gospel. Loving G-d is further defined in this verse by those who respond according to which Paul simply calls "predetermination". Most translations render the word "πρόθεσιν" as "His purpose". The word "his" is not in the text, but the idea here is the plan or purpose that G-d has established from eternity past. In other words, the believer in Messiah who demonstrates a love for G-d and who is submitting to the will of G-d, can expect that whatever happens to him, G-d will eventually use that for good.

In the next verse there is a word that has great significance, but often is ignored by many theologians. The word is "foreknow" "προέγνω" and this Greek word, like in English, is derived from two words: "before" and "to know". Why does Paul include this idea within this discussion? The word is used in regard to those whom G-d also predestinated. Romans 8:29 makes it absolutely clear what G-d predetermined or predestinated is that believers in Messiah will be conformed to the image of the Son, Messiah Yeshua. The Biblical word "predestinated" is "προοράω", which literally means "to see before". Hence, the intent of predestination is simply that G-d saw beforehand that believers would be conformed to the image of Yeshua. Some have correctly pointed out that a more exact Greek term for predestination is the word "προορίζω". This word means simply "to set limits or boundaries beforehand". Therefore a fuller meaning for the term predestination is not only did G-d see in the past what believers would be, i.e. like Messiah, He also predetermined the likeness as well. Once again there is nothing yet from the text that HaShem predetermined who will be the ones to be conformed to the likeness of Messiah, just that all believers have been predestinated to experience this.

Reformed theologians commonly state what the word "foreknow" does not mean, but seldom comment on its use in the verse. Reformed theologians strongly deny that the term "foreknowledge" has to do with knowing the future, but rather has to do with G-d choosing individuals from before the foundations of the world were laid to be in relationship with Him.

Hence, Reformed theologians state that G-d's foreknowledge has nothing to do with Him looking at the future and seeing who will accept the Gospel and who will not. If this were the case, then foreknowledge would be based on the decision of man to accept the Gospel. This would mean that man has the ability to cooperate with G-d's grace. Reformed theologians understand the grace of G-d as being placed upon man in an irresistible manner. Furthermore, although "foreknowledge" is not HaShem knowing the future, obviously G-d knows the future and Reformed theologians agree. The problem with Reformed theology is that it sees G-d knowing the future as the same as Him determining it. This point one must reject. There is no logical basis for stating that because G-d knows the future perfectly that He has caused everything in the future to happen. There is a significant difference between God's knowing what will occur and God's ordaining that same thing to occur.

In returning to the term "foreknowledge", let us accept the definition of our Reformed friends and state that the concept of "foreknowledge" is that G-d knew who would be in His Kingdom apart from any action that a man would take. Now Romans 8:29 would teach that those whom G-d knew would be part of His redeemed family, He also predetermined that they would be conformed to the image of the Son. In the next verse the reader learns that not only has G-d predetermined what believers will be (like Yeshua), but also HaShem called them. The word "to call" and its related forms appear in the Greek New Testament 148 times. The basic meanings are "to name something or someone" or "to seek one's attention" or "to invite one to respond to a command or request".

Because Reformed theologians believe that election is not based upon anything man does or will do, they prefer to understand the term "called" within the context of being given a name. Since the idea of "name" is synonymous with character or identity, Reformed theologians understand the verse to reveal that G-d, after predetermining who are the "elect", He calls them, i.e. He gives them a new identity as His people and therefore identifies them with Himself. Due to this He also does the rest of what this verse reveals, He justifies them and ultimately glorifies them, i.e. makes them into the likeness of His Son.

Although this view is advantageous, because it regards the whole issue of salvation as an act of G-d alone, and thereby He alone is worthy of Praise; there are a few flaws associated with it. The first is the understanding of the term predestination. Reformed theologians ascribe to it a meaning which cannot be derived from the Scripture. For them, predestination is to predetermine who will be saved by G-d, rather than the Scriptural definition, what G-d has predetermined believers will become, i.e. like Yeshua. Second under the framework which Reformed theologians set up, all the "called" must be saved. It is clear that Romans 8:30 is speaking about a situation that will indeed occur for those who are the subject of this verse, i.e. believers in Messiah. It is vital for the reader to remember that the subject of the verse is established by the phrase "οὓς δὲ προώρισεν" "And those He predestinated". Whom did HaShem predestinate to be conformed to the likeness of Messiah? The answer is believers in the Gospel. Our reformed friends will agree and say it is only the elect who will believe. This is true, but is only the elect called?

At this time it is necessary to deal with the common meaning of "Predestination". The understanding of this term by most individuals (not necessarily theologians) is that G-d has chosen who will be saved. The question that follows is does this mean that He has also predetermined who will likewise be condemned? Most Reformed theologians distance themselves from the idea that G-d predetermines who will be eternally condemned. They state

that G-d is just and therefore although He moves to save the elect; one should not understand that He similarly moves to bring condemnation on those who are not the elect. In other words, G-d simply leaves the non-elect alone and in the end His justice is placed upon them, which rightly condemns them. Hence all people receive the justice of G-d, the elect as recipients of G-d's grace and eternal life in His Kingdom and the others His justice which rightly punishes them for eternity.

The problem is that under this view, there are those who cannot refuse G-d's grace and there are those who cannot receive G-d's grace. The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace will be studied in greater detail in a later article, but let it suffice for now to point out that a view of election which states that the spiritual condition of all of mankind is predetermine by G-d apart from any human ability to respond to G-d is without foundation. This would mean that who G-d calls must eventually respond in an affirmative manner and that G-d never calls everyone but the elect. Hence those who are not the elect never had any possibility of responding to G-d's call. Such a theological perspective is without foundation.

Before examining a few texts that address this issue, let us be sure of the issue itself. All of humanity is sinful and deserving of eternal punishment. Therefore if G-d were to do nothing and all mankind was condemned, His righteousness is intact. Likewise G-d is under no obligation to call all of humanity to salvation by means of the Gospel. That is, He can have John hear the Gospel and be saved by faith, while Mary does not hear and is eternally condemned; still the righteousness of G-d is maintained, since He is under no obligation to offer the Gospel to Mary.

A problem arises when HaShem becomes angry with those who were offered the Gospel and did not respond. If there is no human factor and faith is an absolute act of G-d compelled upon the elect, it would be unrighteous for G-d to be angry with faithlessness of an individual because that individual would have no ability to respond with faith. In other words, if G-d withholds faith from some, why does He find fault with the faithless, seeing that He did not provide them with this faith?

In regard to my final statement, many will want to quote to me Romans 9:19. This verse will be addressed later in this article. However, before looking at this verse a proper context must be established for understanding what Paul actually intended when he wrote Romans 9:19. In order to do this let us first consider another passage, the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14). Yeshua told this parable in order to teach about the Kingdom, for He said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like...." In this parable Yeshua told of a certain king who made a great wedding banquet for his son. He sent out his servants to inform those who had been invited / called to come. Yet those who were called would not come, in fact some acted in a most offensive manner even killing some of the servants. It is very significant that the reader is told in this passage,

"...The wedding is prepared, but the ones who were called were not worthy."

Matthew 22:8

Finally, both the bad and good were brought to the wedding (See verse 10) showing that salvation is not based on works. The parable ends with the statement,

"For many are the called ones, but few are the elect." Matthew 22:14

This verse makes it most evident that there are indeed those who are called / invited to be in the Kingdom, but who refuse and therefore are not the elect. This fact is at odds with most of Reformed theology which understands Romans 8:30 to imply that only the predestinated are called. Another passage that shows an element of human will in regard to responding to the purposes of Messiah is found in Matthew 23. In this section Yeshua is lamenting over Jerusalem and the fact that He wants to gather up the people like a mother hen gathers her chicks, but the text states emphatically, "...and you were not willing." (See Matthew 23:37)

Once again it makes no sense for Yeshua to be lamenting over the residents of Jerusalem for failing to respond to Him, if in fact the only way they could do so was if He were to make them to do so. It is important to understand what is not being said here. If G-d does not provide the way for one to be saved, He is still righteous; as all are guilty of sin and worthy of eternal condemnation. However, for Yeshua to lament over Jerusalem's failure to respond to what Reformed theology coins His "Irresistible Grace" when He has not caused them to receive it, it is illogical on Yeshua's part. In other words, it is not problematic for a sinner to be condemned without any opportunity to find forgiveness except by means of general revelation (See Romans 1:19-21). However, for there to be any disappointment or anger on the part of G-d, when people fail to respond to His Gospel, when according to Reformed theology only the predetermined "elect" have been given the ability, which they are compelled to exercise to respond to G-d's "call" to salvation, is not logical.

In this next section there will be special attention given to the theological term "called". The primary text is from Romans chapter 9 and this section will conclude with a proper understanding of Romans 9:19. The ninth chapter of Romans is paramount in laying the foundation for many of the issues we have been discussing in regard to Reformed theology. In this passage, Paul begins a three chapter discussion of Israel's spiritual condition. It is most important for a proper understanding of this section and the issues which are discussed, that there is recognition of this as the primary subject. Paul begins by stating his grief over Israel's, i.e. Jewish individuals' spiritual condition. It is also important for the reader to recognize that Paul uses the term "Israel" in two distinct manners. This is most evident in verse 6,

"But not implying that the word of G-d was ineffective, for not all the ones out of Israel are of Israel." Romans 9:6

This verse first uses the term "Israel" as what we would call today as Jewish individuals, and the second occurrence relates "Israel" as those who are part of G-d's Kingdom. Next there is another important term used, this is "seed of Abraham". The purpose of this term is to introduce the concept of promise into the passage. The point here is that simply being a physical descendant of Abraham is not sufficient for one being part of "Israel" according to the second usage. In other words, it is faith in the promise of G-d, which Isaac represents and ultimately Messiah fulfills, that is necessary for a Jewish individual to be part of "Israel" in both usages. Paul, after speaking about the true seed of Abraham, Isaac and not Ishmael, the child according to the flesh, moves unto the next generation.

It is the account of Jacob and Esau that offers much information to the reader in assisting one to arrive at the proper understanding of this section. In Romans 9:11-12 two important terms are introduced: "election" and "call". This account speaks of HaShem's sovereign right to choose Jacob and not Esau to continue His covenantal promise. A common error that many Reformed

theologians make, is to understand HaShem's choice (election) of Jacob, as revealing who the beneficiaries of the promise will be. This is not the purpose represented here. The future beneficiaries are ultimately believers in the One Who fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant, i.e. the Messiah. Jacob was simply chosen by G-d to take over Isaac's leadership position for the next generation.

Verse 11 states plainly that this choice of Jacob was not based upon something Jacob would do, i.e. works, but solely on G-d's right to call. Most translations introduce the word "election" into the text. This is fine as long as one realizes the Greek word which is translated "election" is derived from two Greek words meaning literally "to speak out". Who did this speaking out? The answer is obviously G-d, Who calls "καλοῦντος" (See verse 12). It is highly significant that in this passage both the idea of "election" and "calling" are mentioned.

Reformed theology stresses that election is predetermining and is devoid of human free will. In other words, G-d mandates who are the elect and the elect have no option but to respond to the Gospel, as the expression of an "irresistible grace", not offered to an individual, but forced upon him in a manner that it is impossible to reject. The purpose of the phrase in verse 12 "Not from works, but according to the One Who calls" is to help define the conception of "election".

The terms "election" or "the elect" often bring with them an understanding that carries more implications than terms actually represent. The Greek word "ἐκλογὴν", which appears in verse 11, simply should be understood as a choice; therefore the "elect" are the ones who are chosen by G-d. In order to have a fuller comprehension of this issue, the reader must understand that the phrase, "but according to the One Who calls" is included in the passage to provide the necessary information to arrive at a Scripturally based understanding of the terms "election" and "the elect".

It has already been stated that G-d is the One Who calls and that His choice of Jacob was not based on works, i.e. something the Jacob did to earn or to merit the selection. The question that must be answered is if G-d's selection of Jacob was in an absolute vacuum. No one is questioning HaShem's sovereign right to choose Jacob. However verse 13 provides a Scriptural aid for assisting the reader in making a proper interpretation of the passage.

"Just as it has been written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" Romans 9:13

Is this passage stating that the Sovereign G-d is within His right to love and hate whomsoever He wills? G-d is Sovereign, but a Biblically based understanding of the Sovereignty of G-d does not mean that HaShem can do just anything. For example, the fact that the Scriptures state that HaShem is incapable of falsehood "ὁ ἀψευδὴς θεὸς" (See Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2) does not in any way infringe upon His sovereignty. Because G-d has certain attributes, there are things He will simply not do. Some might be inclined to quote from Psalms 115:3 or 135:6 which states that "G-d does whatever He pleases". The word which is the same in both of these passages is "יִצְטַח" and it has a meaning of "to desire". Hence, HaShem does what He desires without any limitations. But because He is good, holy, righteous, etc., He will never desire to do something which is against His perfect character. Now let us return to the verse,

"Just as it has been written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" Romans 9:13

If one wishes to interpret the verse that G-d freely chose to hate Esau, based solely on a view that G-d is sovereign, and therefore He can hate whomever He chooses, there are some serious problems with reconciling this view with the nature of the Biblical G-d. Some Reformed theologians agree and offer a different explanation. These theologians state that HaShem did not choose to hate Esau, rather it was because Esau was a sinner, like all of humanity and because G-d hates sin, He therefore hated Esau. This view would mean that G-d hates all humanity, but for the sake of "the elect" He placed His love upon only them. This theological perspective is why Reformed theology stresses a Limited Atonement. That is, Yeshua did not die for all of humanity, but only for those whom He chose to be saved. It was these, "the elect", who were the recipients of His love and grace. If this were theologically correct, it would empty many verses of their clear message. For example,

"For thus G-d loved the world, with the result that His only begotten Son, He gave; in order that everyone who is believing in Him, should not perish, but should have eternal life." John 3:16

Although this verse is one of the most familiar to believers, it is written in a manner that should not allow one's familiarity to cause one to ignore its strong theological implications. It is most significant that the verbs "loved" and "gave" share a grammatical similarity. This is emphasized all the more with the Greek word "ὥστε" meaning "with the result of". The point the Greek makes is that it was because of HaShem's love for the entire creation "κόσμον", that He gave His Son, Messiah Yeshua. When Reformed theology presents the doctrine of a Limited Atonement, it reduces the Love that G-d has for each person, including G-d's love for the reprobate, to a select group of chosen individuals.

Another example is found in John's first Epistle,

"And He is a propitiation concerning our sins; but not concerning ours alone, but also concerning the entire world." I John 2:2

These two verses (and there are many others as well) make it hard for one to embrace the Reformed theological doctrine of a Limited Atonement.

In regard once again to the verse,

"Just as it has been written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" Romans 9:13

It is of chief importance to pay attention to the Greek word "καθὼς" meaning "just as". This word informs the reader to pay attention to the fact Paul is quoting a verse from the Hebrew Bible. Hence the verse and its context must be understood if one is going to rightly understand the point that Paul is making to the Romans. The verse that Paul quoted is from Malachi 1:2. In this passage HaShem is recounting His choice of Jacob, i.e. the Jewish people, instead of Esau, i.e. Edom. This fits the context of Romans chapter 9 as one needs to remember that Paul's discourse is not about the spiritual condition of Jacob and Esau, but Paul is grieved and concerned about the spiritual condition of the Jewish people in general.

The prophet Malachi, in the name of the L-rd, clearly gives a reason why HaShem states that He hates Esau. G-d judged Edom and laid his mountains to waste, yet in defiance to HaShem's will, he states that he will return and build of the desolate places. Proper study of this passage reveals that it is Edom, like Esau their patriarch, who wants to thwart G-d's plan to use the



Jewish people to complete His covenantal purposes. For this reason HaShem says concerning Edom,

"...And He called them a border of wickedness and the people whom the L-rd is angry forever."  
Malachi 1:4b

Reformed theologians will respond that such an interpretation is a violation of Romans 9:11-12, which states G-d's selection of Jacob and not Esau was not based on works. I would agree that it was not based upon works, but rather a heart condition.

In Romans 9:14, after stating that G-d loves Jacob and hates Esau, Paul writes, in taking the position of those who might find fault with his train of thought,

"Therefore, what shall we say, (Is there) 'unrighteousness concerning G-d, G-d forbid!'"

It is vital in order to reach a Biblically based understanding of Paul's intent to pay close attention to how he responds to this objection stated in verse 14. In the next section, verses 15-18, two very important factors are introduced into the discussion: they are grace / mercy and Pharaoh. Paul actually quotes a portion of Exodus 33:19 when he states,

"For to Moses He says, 'I will be merciful on whomever I will be merciful and I will be compassionate on whomever I will be compassionate.'" Romans 9:15

Greek is a very precise language and in order to rightly understand the New Testament, knowledge of Koine Greek is essential. In this verse one must pay close attention to the mood of the verbs. It is most significant that two verbs are in the future indicative and two verbs are in the present subjunctive.

τῷ Μωϋσεὶ γὰρ λέγει, Ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω.

The subjunctive mood is the mood of possibility or contingency. In examining the verse in question Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, placed the later verb in each of the two verbal clauses in the subjunctive mood. Below I have placed the two subjunctive verbs in bold face:

"For to Moses He says, 'I will be merciful on whomever I will be merciful and I will be compassionate on whomever I will be compassionate.'" Romans 9:15

What can be deduced from this fact? G-d is free to offer mercy and compassion to whomever He chooses, yet there is an element of contingency concerning this mercy and compassion. In order to help one to understand this point one must continue in the rest of the verses of this passage (Verses 16-18).

Paul writes,

"So therefore, not the one who wills, nor the one who runs, but the One Who is merciful—G-d."  
Romans 9:16

When studying this chapter it is important to remember what Paul is teaching. As it has been previously stated, he is speaking about the spiritual condition of the Jewish people. The context is that there were in Paul's day a great number of Jewish individuals who had not responded to the Gospel and therefore it would seem that G-d's selection of the Jewish people had failed. It is verse 16 which informs the reader that G-d's selection was not based upon wanting to be chosen (the one who wills) or on human effort (the one who runs); rather upon HaShem Who shows mercy. In order to understand the intent of this verse and its implications, Paul continues by providing Pharaoh as an example.

The next verse reveals what HaShem's primary purpose was regarding Pharaoh. Paul quotes from Exodus 9:16. Notice that Paul introduces the quotation by writing, "ὅτι Εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο" "that in accordance with this same thing". The intent of this phrase is to inform the reader that what HaShem did with Pharaoh is related to what is taking place among the Jewish people. The quotation states,

"...I have raised you up in order that I might manifest in you My power and in order that My Name might be proclaimed in all the Earth." Romans 9:17

Once again Greek grammar is of the utmost importance. The subjunctive mood is used twice in this verse; the first time with the verb "ἐνδείξωμαι" "I might manifest" and the second time with the verb "διαγγεῖλῃ" "might be proclaimed". Remembering that the purpose of the subjunctive mood is to express possibility or contingency, it is vital one asks the question why these two verbs are in the subjunctive. The answer is that HaShem's two objectives, manifesting His power and that His Name should be proclaimed throughout the earth, were contingent upon Pharaoh. That is, Pharaoh had a real and actual decision to make—how to respond to the mercy of G-d. Even though G-d knew from eternity past exactly how Pharaoh would respond, this in no way whatsoever removes Pharaoh's free will from the situation. HaShem positioned Pharaoh as king of Egypt, the most powerful empire at that time, knowing, but not causing, that Pharaoh would respond in the manner he did. As it will be demonstrated, Pharaoh's disobedience furthered HaShem's will, but it was not G-d's will for Pharaoh to disobey.

The next verse states,

"So therefore, on whom He wills He shows mercy, but on whom He wills He hardens."

Romans 9:18

Understanding the second half of this verse is paramount in understanding the intent of Paul for this chapter. The question that has to be answered is, "What does it mean that HaShem hardened Pharaoh's heart? Reformed theology takes the position that the sovereignty of G-d allows G-d to select whomsoever He wants and harden this person's heart, not based on anything other than HaShem's desire to do so. In other words G-d, so to speak, reached down from heaven and placed His hand upon Pharaoh's heart and it was this act alone that hardened his heart and caused him to behave in the manner he did. Scripture, however, demands that such a perspective be ruled in conflict with the Biblical character of G-d. Furthermore, the account from the book of Exodus concerning Pharaoh reveals a very different scenario. It is this account that now will be studied.

Even before Moses returned to Egypt, HaShem informed him of the following,

"And HaShem said to Moses, 'When you go to return to Egypt, see all the wonders which I placed in your hand and you shall do them before Pharaoh, and I will strengthen his heart and he will not send forth the people.'" Exodus 4:21

It is most significant and key to making the proper interpretation of the passage to note the correlation between the facts that Moses was commanded to do the miracles before Pharaoh and immediately thereafter the text reads, "...and I will strengthen his heart". What is the purpose for this?

Later on in the account, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh and do exactly as they were commanded. Aaron threw his staff upon the ground before Pharaoh and it became a snake. The sorcerers performed the same miracle and even though Aaron's snake ate all the sorcerers' snakes, the reader is told,

"And the heart of Pharaoh was strengthened and he did not listen to them just as HaShem said." Exodus 7:13

Once again it was immediately after Pharaoh had seen the miracle that the reader is informed that his heart was strengthened. A similar event occurred with the plague of blood. After Pharaoh witnessed both Moses and Aaron turning the Nile into blood, and the sorcerers having done the same thing, the text states,

"...and the heart of Pharaoh was strengthened and he did not listen to them just as HaShem said. And Pharaoh turned and went to his home and did not place his heart also to this." Exodus 7:22-23

Special attention must be given to the word which is translated "placed", *שָׂת*. The Hebrew word means "to place" or "to put". It is also used as an idiom "to set one's face towards" (See Numbers 24:1). In this usage it carries the idea of making a decision. Hence Pharaoh, despite the miracles he saw, refused to take them to heart and submit to HaShem's instruction.

In the eighth chapter of Exodus there is a significant change. During the account of the plague of frogs, Pharaoh appeared to submit to HaShem's command to send forth Israel from Egypt. Pharaoh beseeched Moses and Aaron to entreat HaShem in order that He would remove the frogs. Pharaoh stated that if this were done that He would obey HaShem. Moses, wanting to show how powerful HaShem is, responded to Pharaoh's request. However, Moses informed Pharaoh that the frogs in the Nile would remain. In other words, HaShem would return things to exactly how they were before the plague. The text informs the reader that once things returned back to normal,

"And Pharaoh saw that there was relief, and he hardened his heart and did not listen to them just as HaShem said." Exodus 8:11

The significant change here is related to that which Pharaoh had said previously,

"And Pharaoh said, 'Who is HaShem that I should listen to His voice and send forth Israel, I do not know the L-rd and also Israel I will not send forth.'" Exodus 5:2

But in this section from chapter eight, Pharaoh is moved to actually beseech Moses that he would petition HaShem on his behalf. In other words, Pharaoh has come to the conclusion that HaShem exists and is more powerful than his sorcerers and he should obey HaShem. However, after HaShem fulfills Pharaoh's request, Pharaoh refuses to fulfill his part of the agreement. It is only after the reader is told that Pharaoh is no longer unknowing of HaShem, but willfully rejecting the revelation of HaShem that the Scripture states, "and he hardened his heart". The "he" in this verse is obviously Pharaoh. Verse 11 unites this hardening with Pharaoh not listening / obeying the revelation that Moses and Aaron provided to Pharaoh from HaShem.

During the next plague, the lice, the sorcerers inform Pharaoh that what Egypt has been experiencing is none other than "the finger of G-d". Once again, the reader is taught that Pharaoh's heart was strengthened because he did not listen to them just as HaShem said. In the next chapter the Scripture makes it most clear that Pharaoh has grown in his spiritual awareness, but nevertheless refuses to obey G-d. When Pharaoh sees the destruction that the hail is causing, Pharaoh falls under conviction and cries out before Moses and Aaron,

"...I have sinned this time, the L-rd is the Righteous One and I and my people are the wicked ones." Exodus 9:27

Once again Pharaoh petitions Moses that he beseeches HaShem to stop the hail. However, despite Pharaoh being convicted by his sin and arriving at the truth that HaShem is the only Righteous One, once the plague is removed, the text states,

"...And he (Pharaoh) continued to sin and his heart was hardened..." Exodus 9:34

The verb in this verse, "was hardened" "וַיִּכְבֵּד", is in the causative form, i.e. the Hebrew hiphil. This means something caused Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. When one examines the verse, Hebrew grammatical rules demand that which hardened Pharaoh's heart is the fact that after he was convicted by his sin, and came to the revelation that HaShem is the Righteous One, he continued to sin "וַיִּסָּר לְחַטָּא וַיִּכְבֵּד לְבוֹ". If this is the proper interpretation, then why does the Bible state that HaShem hardened Pharaoh's heart? In order to find the answer to this question, let us return to Roman's chapter 9.

The section dealing with Pharaoh is introduced by Paul quoting Exodus 33:19,

"For to Moses He says, 'I will be merciful on whomever I will be merciful and I will be compassionate on whomever I will be compassionate.'" Romans 9:15

Notice that the text only speaks of mercy and compassion. I would strongly argue that Pharaoh witnessing the power of G-d by means of the plagues, and HaShem responding to his requests and even forgiving Pharaoh's sin (See Exodus 10:16-17), are all acts of mercy and compassion. Yet in the end, because Pharaoh rejected all this revelation, his heart was hardened. Hence, G-d did in fact harden Pharaoh's heart, but not by making Pharaoh to disobey G-d, rather by extending to Pharaoh the revelation of a Righteous, forgiving, and Sovereign G-d. Each person should take away from this a very important Biblical principle—failing to respond properly to HaShem's truth will harden a person's heart. The question of can a person respond on his own, that is without G-d's assistance, will be discussed in a later article dealing with the doctrine of Total Depravity.

It is only after properly understanding the example of Pharaoh that Paul is now ready to make the statement,

"So therefore, on whom He wills He shows mercy, but on whom He wills He hardens."

Romans 9:18

Now Romans 9:19 comes into focus. Paul writes in this verse,

"Therefore you will say to me, "Why does He still blame, for His will, this one resisted"?"

Romans 9:19

The error that Reformed theologians make is interpreting this verse to mean that indeed HaShem has made Pharaoh to disobey Him and therefore the verse is questioning why G-d would still punish him, if in fact Pharaoh only did what he was created to do. Reformed theologians believe that G-d is free to create people in any manner in which He wants, even in a manner to disobey Him. The proper interpretation presents HaShem in a much different vain. Verse 19 emphasizes the fact that Pharaoh did not "oppose" G-d's will, but only in the sense that Pharaoh did what HaShem had told Moses that Pharaoh would do in Exodus 9:16.

"...I have raised you up in order that I might manifest in you My power and in order that My Name might be proclaimed in all the Earth." Romans 9:17

Pharaoh disobeyed, not because G-d created him to do so, but rather because HaShem knows each human being perfectly, and His divine purposes took Pharaoh's character into account and HaShem positioned him as the king of Egypt, knowing Pharaoh would disobey Him. On the other hand, Reformed theology demands that one accept the view that the purposes of G-d can only be achieved by sin whereas the proper Scriptural view is that the purposes of G-d cannot be thwarted by sin. Here are a few Biblical examples which illustrate this Biblical truth.

The prophet Habakkuk reveals that HaShem raised up the Babylonians in order to place His judgment upon the house of Judah. The question that must be answered is whether the Babylonians did this out of obedience to G-d or whether they did it simply to fulfill their sinful desire to conquer nations and plunder them. The answer is the latter. This means also that HaShem used the Babylonians to accomplish an aspect of His will, but they did not do so out of obedience and hence they, too, are guilty of sin.

Another example is Judas. G-d always knew that Judas would betray Yeshua, and this betrayal parallels man's sinfulness and the human tendency to reject Messiah. Therefore, G-d utilized Judah's sinful action, but did not cause him to behave in this manner. It is absolutely, theologically incorrect to state it was G-d's will for Judas to betray Yeshua. Rather HaShem, Who knew Judas perfectly, incorporated his sinfulness into the accomplishment of the will of G-d. The aspect that many overlook is that since the first sin in the Garden of Eden, sin is a present reality in this world. Sin however will not champion over HaShem's plans and purposes, for Yeshua will indeed establish His Kingdom and in doing so G-d is free to utilize sinners and their actions to accomplish His Holy and Righteous will. It is these facts that uphold Romans 8:28; that all things work together for good.... Yet at no time does HaShem cause sin or create

an individual to sin. HaShem is not a partner in sin nor is He the author of sin. Yet, the Sovereign G-d may use even the disobedience of man, i.e. sin, to manifest His glory.

Reformed theology sees the next verse of Romans chapter 9 as supporting their position when in reality the opposite is true. In remembering the context, Paul is rejecting the view that because Pharaoh did what G-d said he would do, that it is wrong for HaShem to still find fault with him. Paul writes,

"O man, μενοῦνγε who are you replying to G-d; will the fashioned thing speak to the fashioner, 'Why did you make me thus?'" Romans 9:20

It is most important to recognize the Greek word "μενοῦνγε". This word appears in the New Testament only three times. The meaning of this word is to emphasize the following statement in the clause. The Textus Receptus actually has this word prior to the phrase "O man", that is at the very beginning of the verse. In this situation the Textus Receptus is emphasizing that it is a mere man who is trying to argue with G-d, while in our version, since the word appears prior to the statement "who are you replying to G-d", it is emphasizing the inappropriateness of questioning whether G-d has acted improperly. The verse concludes with the phrase, "'Why did you make me thus?'"

The word translated "make" is "ποιέω". It appears in the New Testament 572 times and can have a variety of meanings from "to make, do, prepare, use, appoint, observe, keep, fulfill, etc.". Since Paul is talking about clay and forming something, it would be natural to follow what virtually all translations do and render this word as "make". While I am not arguing with this rendering, one must follow Paul's illustration throughout the passage (Verses 20-23) in order to arrive at the right understanding. Paul is obviously not talking about the creation of the clay, but rather the forming of the clay, (i.e. the proper understanding of "ποιέω") for a specific purpose. It is this aspect that the reader should emphasize, namely how the clay is being utilized. Here again, the Sovereign G-d may utilize human beings as He sees fit. The reader shall learn later that because HaShem from the very beginning created man to manifest His glory, it is not surprising that G-d may utilize sinners for this same purpose.

In the next verse Paul states this very thing when he speaks of the authority that the potter has over the clay. In this verses Paul declares that the potter may utilize the clay in two distinct manners, but for the same common purpose, manifesting His glory. Paul writes,

"Or does not the potter have the authority of the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor." Romans 9:21

It is vital to follow what Paul is saying. He did not say that the potter made one honorable vessel and one dishonorable vessel. Rather one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor— "... ποιῆσαι ὃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν σκεῦος, ὃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν;". The key Greek word in this clause which appears twice is "εἰς". Although this word may be translated a few different ways, it has the idea of expressing "for the use or service of", "in accordance with", or "with a view to". When considering the Biblical account of Pharaoh, which is the basis for understanding verses 18-23, one must ask which scenario is in line both with what took place with Pharaoh and what Scripture reveals about the character of G-d. Does the Bible present G-d as creating Pharaoh to disobey Him without any possibility of submitting to Him, or is it because HaShem knew Pharaoh perfectly and how he would respond, that G-d positioned him in Egypt as king and

presented him with the various situations where, by means of HaShem's perfect knowledge, Pharaoh's disobedience and sinfulness were utilized by G-d and manifest His glory? The answer is of course the latter. This view is also confirmed by the next verse.

"But if G-d, desiring to manifest the wrath and to make known His power endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath which have been κατηρτισμένα unto destruction." Romans 9:22

Please note that I have not translated one word in this verse. The reason for this is because the word bears great significance on the interpretation. The word is "καταρτίζω" and it appears as a passive perfect participle in this verse. There are two factors which weigh heavily in arriving at the proper understanding of the word. First is its general meaning and the second is the grammatical construction of the word. The word in its verbal forms appears 13 times. It is translated in several different manners. New Testament Greek lexicons render the word with the following meanings, "to adjust, prepare, qualify, repair, fit, etc." In this verse, since it appears as a participle, there is a descriptive quality to the word and because it is in the passive voice, there is external power acting on the subject. Finally, because it is in the perfect tense, the action has a linear aspect, which is that the action began in the past and continues into the present and extends into the future as well.

When examining the word throughout its use in the New Testament, the general meaning is something which becomes "fit" or "appropriate" for a specific objective or purpose. For example, in Matthew 4:21 the sons of Zebedee are in a boat mending their nets. The "mending" is the action which makes the nets "fit" or "appropriate" for a specific objective or purpose, i.e. fishing. In Romans 9:22 HaShem desired to manifest His glory through the expression of the power of His wrath. Therefore He endured with much longsuffering the vessels, i.e. those individuals, who were appropriate for destruction. The fact that the verb is in the passive voice means the verb must be translated "who were made appropriate" for His destruction. It is important to remember that the perfect tense is employed here so the most exact manner to translate the participle is "who have been made appropriate" for His destruction.

"But if G-d, desiring to manifest the wrath and to make known His power, endured with much longsuffering, vessels of wrath, which have been made appropriate unto destruction." Romans 9:22

The intent of this verse is to state that G-d is free to manifest His glory by exercising His wrath, so as to make known His power. One of the ways that HaShem accomplished this was not to immediately destroy the wicked, but to endure their disobedience and even utilize this in order to accomplish His purposes—in this case, to manifest His glory. In this text, HaShem acted in a manner over time (the perfect tense) and He acted upon the wicked (the passive mood) in order to make evident that the wicked were appropriate for His wrath and destruction. The idea that G-d created the individuals in a manner that they had to be wicked and for solely the purpose of being objects of His wrath cannot be supported by this verse or any other verse of Scripture.

The last verse of this section states,

"And in order that He might make known the richness of His glory upon vessels of mercy; which He prepared beforehand unto glory." Romans 9:23

In many discussions with our Reformed friends, I have asked for them to explain why the verb "to make known" "γνωρίση" is in the subjunctive mood. Remembering that the subjunctive mood relates to possibility or contingency, one must answer the question of why Paul was inspired to place the verb in this mood. Could the answer be that there is a degree of contingency concerning whether the richness of His glory will be made known upon the vessels of mercy? Why in the next three verses does the verb "to call" appear? The answers to these questions assist in arriving at the proper understanding of this larger section, "What is the spiritual condition of the Jewish people and how does this relate to the Doctrine of Election." In Part II these issues will continue to be studied in our objective to better understand the Biblical perspective of election.