

Romans Summary  
Week 17, Wednesday January 25, 2017  
Romans 9:19-33

Paul raises the logical question which comes out of his last section. If God has chosen one to be a seed from Abraham's family, and made Israel to 'stand' like Pharaoh — all for the purpose of fulfilling his purpose of establishing his world-wide family and spreading his good name — then how could he find fault? After all who can resist him? His response to the question, on first glance, seems to fault the questioner and refuses to answer. However, he does fault the questioner but explains further.

Again, we have to keep in mind that Paul is *continuing* to tell the Israel story even now. Israel is being sifted and hardened, exodus and exile language, and wants to complain about God's method in doing so — does he have the right to do this? Paul is tapping into the exile prophets to explain God's purposes and God's right to act this way. All of it is in the context of Israel's failure to live up to their vocation. In light of that God has the right to rework the clay to fulfil his purpose — the potter determines the clay, the clay can't determine the potter. In short, imagine the state of affairs if God was limited by Israel's failure.

There is basically two things being asserted here. First, that when the clay becomes a vessel of wrath (like exilic Israel did, and unbelieving Israel are) then they need to be remade into vessels of glory which is the promise of the prophets. Second, enduring with these vessels of wrath, as he did and is, is his method for accomplishing his purpose of creating a world-wide family to Abraham and spreading the glory of his name to all the world.

Israel, as the Messiah's people according to the flesh, shares in the Messiah's mission; to be cast away for the sake of the world. They are paired down to a remnant, which ultimately comes down to the One — Messiah who as Israel's representative takes on her vocation. If it wasn't for God's mercy in choosing a remnant to be saved and come out of exile Israel would have been cut off and the world wide family would not be. God has been faithful to his covenant promises through the gospel.

The next question outlines a paradox: Israel who had Torah and pursued righteousness did not arrive, but Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness found it. The difference comes down to Torah. The Torah which Israel pursued was the Torah which marked them out as Jews in distinction to the surrounding pagan nations. But, if God's purpose has been to create a world-wide family for Abraham then that can't be the way to apprehend Torah truly. Rather, there is an apprehension of Torah — which Gentiles have received — that is by faith. Faith in this Messiah who was crucified and raised to new life by God. It is faith in this Messiah which God has laid in Zion which is a stumbling stone.

Remember, this isn't the last word — the whole section is in the context that God's word has not failed.

**“The Better Bet” reflection and discussion questions:**

1. Why should every Christian own and read a Bible?
2. If inclusion can't be based on people then on what?
3. Why is it such good news that God consigned all to disobedience?
4. Why is defence of the defenceless central to Christianity?