

# BIBLE & BAGEL

## Romans – Our Common Faith

19 February 2016

Sometimes when we see others being “promoted” or blessed spiritually and we are left behind, we can feel that God is unfair? The thing that causes frustration in us is that very often we want to understand God, some even want to hold God to our standard of justice, we forget that He is sovereign, the creator of everything and has the right to do whatever He wants. In this passage we see the Apostle explaining this to the believers in Rome particularly the Jews and he uses examples from Israel’s history to prove his point.

### *Romans 9:10-13*

*10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."*

Apostle Paul uses the account of the birth of Esau and Jacob to illustrate how God chooses the people He wants to use. While the twins, Esau and Jacob were in their mother’s womb God already prophesied over them and said that Jacob, the younger was the chosen one. He quotes from Genesis<sup>i</sup> and Malachi<sup>ii</sup> to prove his point. The point that the Apostle was making here is that both Esau and Jacob are children of Isaac, but only one could inherit the covenant and because Esau’s spirit was wrong, since he valued the flesh more than his spiritual inheritance, which was proven later in life, God chose Jacob over him.

God chose Jacob from the very beginning, before he had done anything. This often ignites the debate between “free will” and “election”, I do not have time to go into this debate in this study, but suffice to say that Apostle Paul was emphasizing the fact that some people are chosen above others, he does not go into detail here about how God chooses or God’s criteria for choosing. In this case however we know that later on in life Esau proved that God was right in rejecting him when he was willing to give up his birth right for a bowl of stew.<sup>iii</sup> We must be aware that God knows the end from the beginning, He knows all things and he knows the heart of man and makes decision based on His omniscience. The question we have to ask ourselves is which do we value more, the things of this world or the things of the spirit?

### *Romans 9:14-21*

*14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."\* 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."\* 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? NKJV*



Apostle Paul also uses the example of Pharaoh as one who was against God yet God used Him to display His power in the earth. It is not about whether the person is righteous or unrighteous but God in His eternal wisdom and omniscience chooses how He will use people; with some like Pharaoh and Esau who proved through their life where their heart was, He will use them as a negative example but others who are submitted to him He uses positively.

So the Apostle counters the argument that God is unfair and unrighteous by making such choices and he quotes Exodus<sup>iv</sup> where God tells Moses that He is sovereign and He can show mercy and have compassion on whomever He pleases. The he tells the people who would then say that God should not hold them accountable then since He is the one who determined their destiny was to be unrighteous. He rebukes them saying we humans are merely clay vessels and actually have no right to argue with God.

In these passages Paul was telling the Jews two things; the first was that it is the Jews who believe that will be saved (chosen) and second, that God can have mercy and compassion on the Gentiles as well. Religious often think that God belongs only to them because He made covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob therefore God did not love or want the Gentiles. But Apostle Paul was refuting this kind of thinking.

As Christians we sometimes want to hold God accountable to us, one fine example is Jonah, he reluctantly went to Nineveh and when he delivered the message of God the people repented. He then sat moping because God forgave the Ninevites. For sure these were first of all Gentiles and secondly they were very evil people, much like ISIS of today, yet God forgave them and Jonah was unhappy with God. We too sometimes judge others and we feel that some people are deserving of God's wrath, we must bear in mind that God has the right to forgive and bless anyone He pleases, He is after all, King and Lord. We must submit to His will and not He to ours.

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 25:23

<sup>ii</sup> Malachi 1:2,3

<sup>iii</sup> Genesis 25

<sup>iv</sup> Exodus 33:19

