

What are Vessels of Wrath (Romans 9:22)?

In [Romans 9](#), Paul deals with the sovereignty of God in [election](#), picturing God as a potter working with clay: “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory?” ([Romans 9:21–23](#)). The vessels of wrath are contrasted with the vessels of mercy; one set is slated for destruction, and the other for glory.

Let’s take a quick review of the letter to the Romans: Paul highlights the need everyone has for God’s righteousness ([Romans 1–3](#)) and how God provided for humanity to have that righteousness by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This gift is available because of Jesus’ sacrifice at the cross ([Romans 3–4](#)). In Romans, Paul also describes the results for everyone who has received God’s grace ([Romans 5–8](#)) and provides evidence of God’s trustworthiness in how He provides salvation to Jews and Gentiles ([Romans 9–11](#)). Paul concludes his letter by outlining the responsibilities of believers to live righteously ([Romans 12–16](#)). In [Romans 9:22](#) Paul mentions vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, reminding his readers that the story doesn’t end happily for everyone.

Even as he is challenging his readers to trust in God, Paul laments the fact that many of his fellow countrymen (Israelites) were unbelieving ([Romans 9:1–5](#)). Paul explains, however, that this sad state of affairs was not a failure of God or His Word ([Romans 9:6](#)). God had [promised](#) that Abraham’s descendants would be blessed but had chosen Abraham’s line through Isaac and then Jacob ([Romans 9:7–13](#)). Not everyone who would come from Abraham would be blessed through that specific promise. God had certainly promised blessing for all the families of the earth through Abraham’s specific descendant ([Genesis 12:3b](#))—Jesus Christ—but the promises pertaining to a great and blessed nation would be for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The question is whether God has the right to choose whom He will bless and how. If God is sovereign, then we should trust Him as the One who knows how to deliver us. But Paul introduces the idea in [Romans 9:22](#) that there are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Not everyone will trust in Him, apparently.

If God has the right to choose who will be blessed and how, then some might question whether God is unjust by not ensuring the same outcome for everyone. Paul addresses this question in [Romans 9:14–18](#), explaining that God has the right (as the Creator) to have mercy on whom He will have mercy and the right to harden whom He will harden ([Romans 9:18](#)). Paul cites God’s dealings with Pharaoh in Exodus as an example.

Paul then anticipates the question of how God can hold people accountable if, ultimately, He is making these kinds of choices ([Romans 9:19](#)). Rather than answer directly, Paul appeals to God’s sovereignty as the Creator and the owner of what He has created ([Romans 9:20–21](#)). Pottery doesn’t question the right of the potter to fashion it in a particular way. The potter has the right to [fashion from the clay](#) whatever he wants. Paul elaborates by asking a series of questions: what if God—who has the power to judge and exert His authority—was patient with vessels of wrath prepared for destruction ([Romans 9:22](#))? Does God have the right to be patient? Or is He restricted in His ability to show mercy and patience? Clearly, God has that right with no restrictions.

Some have wrestled with Paul’s statement that there are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Some have even concluded that he is teaching a doctrine often called [double election](#)—that God chooses who will not be saved in the same way He chooses who will be saved. But, like Paul said in [1 Corinthians 4:6](#), we should not go beyond what is written. We need to be careful about making inferences when a verse is not explicit.

In the case of the vessels of wrath, Paul raises a hypothetical—a “what if”—to remind readers that God has the right to make such choices if He so desires. But Paul stops short of asserting that God *is* making such choices. Paul’s point is that God has the right to have mercy on whom He chooses and harden whom He chooses ([Romans 9:18](#)), but that is different from asserting that God chooses some not to be saved. Paul isn’t addressing *that* question; he is making a point about God’s [sovereign authority](#). Thus, if someone is not receiving a blessing because God didn’t promise him that blessing, neither God nor His Word has failed. If He is indeed the Creator, He has the right to bless whom He will, and He has the right to harden whom He will. If He is the Potter, how He deals with vessels of wrath prepared for destruction is His prerogative.

“What are Vessels of Wrath?” GotQuestions website. <https://www.gotquestions.org/vessels-of-wrath.html>