

Prepared by Whom? Reprobation and Non-Calvinist Interpretations of Romans 9:22

Wayne A. Brindle
Professor of Biblical Studies
Liberty University

It has become commonplace among Calvinist writers to portray Romans 9 as the cornerstone of Biblical proof for election and reprobation.¹ Of ten passages listed by Berkhof as supporting reprobation, fully half are located here. Non-Calvinists have recognized the importance of Romans 9 in the debate, and have attempted to develop persuasive arguments in opposition.² Whether these arguments have any viability in the face of Romans 9:22 is the subject of this paper. We will investigate whether any non-Calvinist readings of this passage are exegetically and theologically possible within the scope of what Paul was trying to accomplish in Romans 9.

I. THE JEWISH CONTEXT OF ROMANS 9:22

The epistle to the Romans may be read as Paul's version of salvation history, which attempts to solve the "Jewish question" while at the same time restating in detail Paul's universal gospel in order to gain the support of the complete Roman church.³ Paul's teaching on justification by faith can be understood as an answer to the question, "How is it possible for the Jew and the Gentile to stand on the same level of advantage before God?"⁴ The opening sections of the epistle demonstrate that the Law, rather than giving the Jew a position of advantage over the Gentile, really gives him greater responsibility and potential for judgment. Paul shows that the Jew is just as much in need of God's grace as the Gentile (1:18-3:20). He then describes the means by which Jews as well as Gentiles can receive and experience that grace (3:21-8:39).

Paul's Argument in Romans 9

When Paul arrives at chapter 9, he is ready to deal with the major "salvation-history" question of the book: "If Israel's blessings are freely open to Gentiles, what then of the promises to Israel itself?"⁵ Does the fact that most of the Jews have so far rejected Paul's gospel imply that God has now rejected Israel and taken back his promises?

Paul's answer to this question is a resounding "No." God never promised to save all the physical descendants of Abraham. First, when God gave Abraham the original promise, he stated specifically that it would be fulfilled in Abraham's son, Isaac (9:7). It is only the one that God named in the promise for whom he should be held accountable. Second, Isaac's wife, Rebecca, conceived two sons at the same time by one man. Yet God chose one of them for his covenantal blessing, not both. The Jews should not think that every physical Jew has to receive God's saving grace in order for God to be true to his promises. God remains righteous and true in spite of Israel's rejection of the gospel. The choice of Isaac over Ishmael and of Jacob over Esau was specifically for covenant leadership.

Paul next demonstrates that God can go beyond justice (cf. Rom. 2:7-10) and show his mercy to some but not all (9:14-29). God gave Moses his mercy, for example, yet he judged Pharaoh for his rebellion. God always judges on the basis of works (2:6), but he is free to go beyond judgment and give mercy to some (9:18). Does this mean that God unfairly judges the sin which he himself causes? No. The point of the illustration concerning the potter and his clay is not to portray God treating people like dirt, but rather to rebuke the attitude that would imply that God is unrighteous (cf. 3:3-8). The real answer comes in 9:22-23. God wants to show both his justice (wrath and power) and his mercy (riches of glory). Those who either are prepared or prepare themselves for destruction will receive just punishment, just as did

¹ See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 89. Calvinists often refer to John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), as the best contemporary defense of this approach.

² Schreiner, "Romans 9," 90; see C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A Balanced View of Salvation Truth* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2005), 298-304.

³ See Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 227; David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 179.

⁴ Donald H. Madvig, "The Missionary Preaching of Paul: A Problem in New Testament Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (June 1977): 150.

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), lxii.

Pharaoh (9:22). On the other hand, those to whom God has shown mercy and whom he has prepared beforehand will receive his glory (9:23). This latter group includes the entire Church, both Jews and Gentiles (9:24).

Paul's Argument in Romans 9:14-18

In 9:14 Paul introduces the question of God's justice or fairness in refusing to guarantee a perpetual universal blessing to the entire nation. First, he uses God's reply to Moses ("I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy"—9:15; Exod. 33:19) to demonstrate that God's blessing and compassion do not depend on man's desire ("him who wills") nor on man's works ("him who runs"), but on the mercy-showing God (9:16). Next Paul describes the negative example of God's interaction with Pharaoh, through which Pharaoh's heart was hardened to the extent that he lost his first-born son (9:17). Paul infers that God "has mercy on whom he desires" (such as Moses) and "He hardens whom he desires" (such as Pharaoh) (9:18). Reformed scholars sometimes see a sign of reprobation here.⁶ But many others are not so extreme. Sanday and Headlam, for example, state that Paul "never says or implies that God has created man for the purpose of his damnation."⁷ Morris says that "neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself."⁸ The evidence of Exodus 4-14 demonstrates that the hardening of Pharaoh depended primarily upon his own stubborn rebellion, as follows: (1) God announced to Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that God would be able to show his power, signs, and wonders (Exod. 4:21; 7:3); (2) Pharaoh rejected Moses' message and God's plagues, and hardened his heart against God (Exod. 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35); and (3) God then hardened Pharaoh's heart as further judgment and punishment (Exod. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8).

In Romans 9:17 Paul cites Exodus 9:16 to the effect that God "raised up" Pharaoh to demonstrate his power in him. Could this choice of verb (ἐξήγειρα) indicate that God brought Pharaoh into existence to destroy him (created for destruction and hell)?⁹ Though it has a wide range of uses—to awaken from sleep, to raise from the dead, to raise up to a sitting position, to cause to appear—the majority of scholars agree that here it must refer here to God's placing Pharaoh in power, appointing him to a particular role in history through which God would be able to show his power and justice to the entire world.¹⁰

Paul's Argument in Romans 9:19-21

Paul now depicts an imaginary (Jewish) objector taking issue with his logic. If God hardens some and gives mercy to others, how can God still punish those who disobey Him? Perhaps it's his will (βούλημα) for them to disobey.

Paul meets this objection head-on, but not first by answering the questions. He argues that the questions are not legitimate, because man the creature has no right to ask them of God the creator. Alluding to several Old Testament illustrations of a potter and his clay (Isa. 29:16; 45:9-10; Jer. 18:1-11), Paul shows that no one has a right to answer back to God. He rebukes the irreverence of the questions.

However, the potter has complete authority over his clay. In fact, the potter can even divide his clay in half, and make one half into fine pottery and the other half into a dish for the dog (Rom. 9:21). Does this fact mean that it would be fair for God to create people simply to punish or destroy them? Not even a human potter would create a pot simply to destroy it. But in actuality, Paul does not refer to any of these vessels being destroyed. His point is simply that God has the right to do what he wants with them.

Does God treat people like dirt (clay)? Paul never says so. He merely says that for a person to talk back to God and accuse Him of injustice is like a clay pot telling its maker he made a mistake in the way he made it.

⁶ See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 598; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:28-30; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 510.

⁷ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 258.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 361. That this interpretation is in accord with the message of Romans is shown by its relationship to Paul's description of God's condemnation of pagans and moralists earlier in the epistle. In 1:24, 26, 28 Paul pronounces God's judicial "handing over" of idol-worshippers to a life of depravity and gross sin—a lifestyle that they had already chosen—so that they suffer the consequences of sin through their own choice. Then in chapter two he notes that the reason that God doesn't immediately punish sinners with death is that He gives them opportunities to repent (2:4).

⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 509-10.

¹⁰ See Moo, 595; Murray, 2:27; Morris, 360; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 486.

Paul's Argument in Romans 9:22

v. 22 - εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκευὴ ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν

Verse 22 begins with an “if” (protasis) that has no corresponding “then” (apodosis)—“but if God, willing . . .” The verse is notoriously difficult to translate, but most translators prefer to begin with “what if . . .”¹¹ Based on this uncompleted condition, the sentence contains four assertions:

- (1) God wills to demonstrate his wrath (against sinners?).
- (2) God wills to make his power known.
- (3) God endured “vessels of wrath” with much patience.
- (4) The “vessels of wrath” are prepared for destruction.

Since the participle θέλων is probably causal, perhaps the best translation of the verse is as follows: “But what if God, because he wanted to demonstrate his wrath and make his power known, bore [endured] with much patience the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” The desire of God to demonstrate his wrath and power is probably an allusion back to the quotation in verse 17 concerning Pharaoh: “to demonstrate my power in you.”¹² God wants to show the world the reality of his power in judgment of those who rebel against Him. This will ultimately occur at the final judgment (Rev. 20), but God has already shown his wrath and power throughout the history of Israel—both in Israel’s favor and against them (e.g., the Exodus, the Babylonian captivity, the return from exile).

God has also endured the rebellious nation of Israel “with much patience” throughout their history—sending prophet after prophet to call the nation back from idolatry and spiritual adultery to faith and commitment to Himself (cf. Romans 10:21). Some scholars think it unlikely that the reason for God’s patience in this context is to allow time for repentance. Horst says, “The delay is simply to bring out more clearly what God already wills (θέλων) and knows, but what he allows to come to plain fulfillment in man. In no case, then, does μακροθυμία give the sinner a possibility of securing a claim on God’s goodness.”¹³ Schreiner agrees, arguing that “God defers his immediate judgment of vessels of wrath so that he can unveil the full extent of his power and wrath on those who continually resist his offer of repentance (cf. 10:21).”¹⁴

But this interpretation appears to go contrary to the way God’s patience is spoken of elsewhere by Paul. As noted above, Romans 2:4 states that God’s patience and kindness are intended to lead sinners to repentance. And Ephesians 2:3 shows that those who were “children of wrath” can become believers.

II. THE LEXICAL CONTENT OF ROMANS 9:22

We will now give specific attention to the three most crucial terms in 9:22.

σκευὴ ὀργῆς

This phrase has been variously interpreted as “vessels which deserve God’s anger,”¹⁵ vessels for the purpose of wrath,¹⁶ vessels destined for wrath,¹⁷ and “instruments of wrath.”¹⁸ Grammarians categorize ὀργῆς as a descriptive genitive¹⁹ (thus, “vessels characterized by wrath”) or a genitive of content (“vessels full of wrath”)²⁰ or as “bearers of wrath.”²¹ According to Stählin, the metaphor derives from Jeremiah 27:25 (LXX): “The Lord has opened his treasury, and brought forth the weapons of his wrath [τὰ σκευὴ ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ]; for the Lord God has a work in the land of the

¹¹ Cf. KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, NRSV, NAB; for a discussion of some translation issues in the passage, see Paul Ellingworth, “Translation and Exegesis: A Case Study (Rom 9,22ff.),” *Biblica* 59:3 (1978):396-402.

¹² Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 334.

¹³ J. Horst, “μακροθυμία,” *TDNT* 4:382-83.

¹⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 521; cf. Murray, 2:35.

¹⁵ Sanday and Headlam, 261.

¹⁶ Murray, 2:33.

¹⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 518.

¹⁸ A. T. Hanson, “Vessels of Wrath or Instruments of Wrath? Romans IX. 22-3,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 32 (1981): 433-43.

¹⁹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 496; Nigel Turner, *Syntax* (vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*; ed. James H. Moulton; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 213.

²⁰ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, trans. Joseph Smith (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), 15.

²¹ Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 92.

Chaldeans.” He says that in the Greek Old Testament it means “the vessel whereby God executes his anger, while in the NT it means the vessel on which he executes it . . . the vessel into which his anger is poured so that it is wholly filled therewith and bound to fall victim to destruction.”²²

It appears that the vessels of wrath in Romans 9 are best identified as those (especially of Israel) who are destined to suffer God’s wrath for sin. However, as Cranfield notes, this expression, “while indicating that those whom it denotes are indeed objects of God’s wrath at the time in question, does not imply that they must always remain such.”²³ Indeed, “it is God’s purpose that the σκεύη ὀργῆς should become σκεύη ἐλέους” (vessels of mercy).

Some exegetes assume that the vessels of wrath must be foreordained for hell because of a supposed parallel with the “vessel for dishonor” deliberately made so in verse 21. However, if this were the case, Paul would probably have used anaphoric definite articles with both occurrences of σκεύη in verse 22.²⁴

ἀπόλειαν

This word (the opposite of σωτηρία) is normally used by Paul to refer to final destruction and condemnation.²⁵ In Philippians 3:19 it refers to ungodly men who are self-serving and sensual, whose “end” is destruction. Paul uses these words to describe the ultimate destiny of the unsaved. Here in Romans 9:22 the vessels of wrath are bound for this end, just as in Matthew 7:13 the same destruction is waiting at the end of the broad way.

κατηρτισμένα

Up to this point we have seen that the Calvinistic interpretation of Romans 9 has no claim to superiority, nor is reprobation directly taught anywhere in 9:1-21 or in the first part of 9:22. It is probably fair to say, however, that this word—normally translated “prepared” in this verse—is the locus of the primary argument for reprobation in Romans.

The verb καταρτιζω meant to “put in order, restore, put into proper condition, complete, prepare, make, create.”²⁶ It is used in the active voice with God as subject and in the passive voice with God as agent (meaning “made” or “created for something”); it is also used in the middle voice with the meaning to “prepare something for someone,” and with a benefactive meaning “for oneself,” as in Matthew 21:16 (quoted from Ps. 8:3)—“you have prepared praise for yourself.”²⁷ Louw and Nida suggest three divisions of meanings: to “make adequate,” to “produce,” and to “create.” It can mean to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something, or to cause something to happen by means of some arrangement, or to create, with the implication of putting into proper condition.²⁸

The form κατηρτισμένα is a perfect middle or passive participle. If the voice is passive, then the vessels of wrath were prepared by someone other than themselves for destruction. If it is middle, it becomes possible that the vessels prepared themselves, reflexively. Let’s look at the evidence for both views.

Passive Voice. The following arguments support the passive view: First, verse 18 says that God hardened Pharaoh; he must also have prepared the unbelieving vessels for destruction. Second, God must be the potter who prepares vessels (cf. v. 21). Third, since God is the one who prepares some for glory (v. 23), he must also be the one who prepares others for non-glory. Fourth, God elsewhere prepared specific people for destinies (cf. 1 Thess. 5:9; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rev. 13:8).²⁹

Fifth, God is free to do whatever he wants. As White puts it, “Why is there no ... option ... in which the pots prepare themselves based upon their own choice? Because pots don’t have such a capacity! Pots are pots! Since God wishes to

²² Gustav Stählin, “ὀργή,” *TDNT* 5:435.

²³ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:495.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 4.

²⁵ See Philippians 1:28; 3:19. The cognate verb ἀπόλλυμι has a similar reference (see Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3).

²⁶ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 417-18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:680; 1:163; 1:514. According to Delling, a better translation in Romans 9:22 is to “foreordain.” He asserts that the meaning “ready or ripe for destruction” has “no philological justification” (Gerhard Delling, “καταρτιζω,” *TDNT* 1:476).

²⁹ James E. Rosscup, “Paul’s Concept of Eternal Punishment,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 9:2 (1998): 177; George J. Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace* (Little Rock, Ark.: B.T.D.S.G., 2002), 156, n. 762.

make known the ‘riches of his grace’ to his elect people (the vessels prepared of mercy), there *must* be vessels prepared for destruction.”³⁰

Sixth, the middle voice is rare in the New Testament, while the passive is common. Seventh, the context puts an emphasis on God’s sovereignty and freedom, not human agency.³¹

Middle Voice. First, Paul says specifically that God prepared the vessels of mercy for glory, but he deliberately does not say this about the vessels of wrath. Second, God is said to have “endured with patience” the vessels of wrath, indicating that they were working against God, thus preparing themselves for judgment through disobedience. Third, the “whoever” in Romans 10:11-13 (“whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”) must also apply to the vessels of wrath in 9:22; human responses are important in determining destinies. Fourth, Paul elsewhere says that people must believe in order to be saved, and those who do not are condemned (Rom. 10:3-4). Fifth, Jeremiah 19:11 describes the breaking of a clay vessel representing God’s judgment of Israel, which prepared itself for destruction by refusing to repent.³²

Sixth, as Morris says, “the difference in construction from the next verse (the passive over against the active, the participle against the indicative, the absence here of anything equivalent to the prefix for ‘before’) makes it probable that we should not think of God as doing this. Rather the people did it themselves.”³³

Seventh, Chrysostom, who knew Greek better than we all, interpreted this word as a middle voice, explaining it as a reflexive—“they prepared themselves for destruction.”³⁴

III. THE SYNTAX OF ΚΑΤΗΡΤΙΣΜΕΝΑ

Daniel Wallace objects strongly to the middle voice interpretation of *κατηρτισμένα*. He makes the following major points: First, the direct (reflexive) middle is quite rare and is used almost exclusively in certain idiomatic expressions, especially where the verb is used consistently with such a notion (as in the verbs for putting on clothes). Nowhere else in the NT does *καταρτίζω* occur as a direct middle. Second, in the perfect tense, the middle-passive form is always to be taken as a passive in the NT (Luke 6:40; 1 Cor 1:10; Heb 11:3). Third, the lexical nuance of *καταρτίζω*, coupled with the perfect tense, suggests something of a “done deal.” Fourth, the context argues strongly for a passive and completed notion. Back in verse 20 the vessel is shaped by God’s will, not its own. In verse 21, Paul asks a question with *οὐκ* (thus expecting a positive answer): Is not the destiny of the vessels (one for honor, one for dishonor) entirely predetermined by their Creator? Verse 22 is the answer to that question.³⁵

My brief responses to Wallace’s objections are as follows: First, it is true that the direct middle is rare in the NT. However, Wallace includes many examples in his *Syntax* that are one of a kind for that lexeme; in fact, the first example in his list of direct middles is only used once in the entire NT. We do not determine function by probability, but by context.

Second, I believe Wallace is mistaken when he says that the perfect middle-passive form of *καταρτίζω* is always to be taken as a passive in the NT. He lists three passages, of which one is 1 Corinthians 1:10—

Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες καὶ μὴ ἦ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἧτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ.

Most English versions (including the RSV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB, NIV, and NLT) translate the relevant section, “that you may be united [or perfectly united] in mind and judgment.” This is the same form as in Romans 9:22 (perfect

³⁰ James White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 214.

³¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 521-22.

³² Rosscup, “Paul’s Concept,” 177.

³³ Morris, 368; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 328. See also James R. Edwards, *Romans*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 241; John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 272; W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 261; William Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Moody, 1938), 374.

³⁴ Chrysostom *Homilies on Romans* 16.

³⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 418. Wallace adds in footnote 28: “The verb occurs 13 times in the NT, seven as a middle or passive form. Of those seven, two are definitely middle, being aorist (Matt 21:16; Heb 10:5), and both are obviously indirect middles. The other four (Rom. 9:22 being excluded from the count) are all almost surely passive (Luke 6:40; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb 11:3).

middle/passive participle), except for gender and case. These versions all use a direct middle translation of the verb: To be “united together” is virtually the same as “making yourselves united/complete” (reflexive).

Third, we will see below that, outside the New Testament, many occurrences of this same form are commonly translated “fully equipped.” This is similar to the “ready” or “fitted” translation that Wallace rejects for Romans 9:22. His argument that the idea of a “done deal” or “complete preparation” rules out a reflexive or “self-prepared” interpretation seems especially weak.

Fourth, the context only argues strongly for a passive notion if one presupposes reprobation and a deterministic approach to God’s sovereignty in Romans 9. I have tried to show that such an interpretation is neither necessary nor likely. As Hanson notes, “We do not need to conclude that God previously chose them to be the objects of his wrath: by their unbelief they choose themselves.”³⁶

κατηρτίσμενος outside the New Testament

The perfect middle/passive participle of καταρτίζω is found 35 times in extant Greek literature from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D. Note the following examples.

Polybius - Histories

150 B.C.

Hist 1.59.7

kata\ ga\r ta\j tw¹/₂n bi\zwn eu)kairi\zaj kaq' e\Aana kai\ du/o kai\ trei\j u(fi\zstano pare/cein penth/rh **kathrtisme/nhn**, e) f' %O th\n dapa/nhn komiou=ntai, kata\ lo/gon tw¹/₂n pragma/twn proxwrhsa/ntwn.

either one, two, or three of them, according to their means, undertook to provide a quinquereme **fully equipped** on the understanding that they would be repaid if all went well.³⁷

Hist 5.89.8

xwrii\j de\ penth/reij me\n de/ka **kathrtisme/naj**, si\z tou d' ei\Aakosi muria/daj, kai\ mh\n cu/lwn kai\ r(hti\znhj kai\ trixo\j muria/daj phxw¹/₂n kai\ tala/ntwn xilia/daj.

presented them with ten quinqueremes **fully equipped**³⁸

Hist 14.10.10

to\n de\ tw¹/₂n u(penanti\zwn sto/lon e)c o\Alou tou= xeimw¹/₂noj pro\j au)to\ tou=to **kathrtisme/non**, to\ me\n a)ntana/gesqai kai\ nau-maxei\fn a)pognou/j

while the enemy’s fleet **had** during the whole winter **been equipping** for this very purpose³⁹

Diodorus Siculus - Histories

30 B.C.

12.33.2

kai\ e)yhfi\zsato summaxei\fn Kerkurai\zoi.j. dio\ kai\ pa-raxrh=ma me\n e)ce/pemyan trih/reij **kathrtisme/naj** de/ka

Consequently they dispatched at once ten **fully equipped** triremes⁴⁰

³⁶ Hanson, “Vessels of Wrath,” 441.

³⁷ Polybius, *Hist.* 1.59.7 (Paton, LCL).

³⁸ Polybius, *Hist.* 5.89.8 (Paton, LCL).

³⁹ Polybius, *Hist.* 14.10.10 (Paton, LCL).

⁴⁰ Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 12.33.2 (Oldfather, LCL).

12.33.3

eÃxontej ouÃn nau=j **kathrtisme/nai** e(kato\n penth/konta, kaiì strathgou\j e(lo/menoi tou\j xarie-sta/touj, a)nh/xqhsan e)piì th\n Ke/rkuran, kekriko/tej

With, therefore, one hundred and fifty **fully equipped** triremes⁴¹

19.62.8

kath/gage ska/fh Dioskouriçdhj o)gdoh/konta. prou+ph=rxon d' au)t%½ **kathrtisme/nai** nau=j tw½n e)n Foi-niçkv

The first to be finished of the ships that had been made in Phoenicia were also at hand **fully equipped**.⁴²

If one looks carefully at these excerpts (within 200 years before Paul), one will discover that the form, structure, and syntax of these occurrences of *κατηρτισμενος* are similar to what we find in Romans 9:22. Most of them are adjectival in function. If we translate the form in 9:22 in a similar fashion—“vessels of wrath fully equipped for destruction”—we can observe the similarity. It is not far from the concept of being “ready” for battle—or, in the case of Romans 9, being ready or “outfitted” for destruction.

IV. CONCLUSION

I close with some of Chrysostom’s teaching on this passage:

Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath, that is, a man who by his own hard-heartedness had kindled the wrath of God. For after enjoying much long-suffering, he became no better, but remained unimproved. Wherefore he calls him not only “a vessel of wrath,” but also one “fitted for destruction.” That is, fully fitted indeed, but by his own proper self. For neither had God left out aught of the things likely to recover him, nor did he leave out aught of those that would ruin him, and put him beyond any forgiveness. Yet still, though God knew this, “He endured him with much long-suffering,” being willing to bring him to repentance. For had he not willed this, then he would not have been thus long-suffering. But as he would not use the long-suffering in order to repentance, but fully fitted himself for wrath, he used him for the correction of others.⁴³

Even Calvinists recognize the difficulty of combining the logic of reprobation with Scripture. W. C. Campbell-Jack says that “we have at best reduced the Almighty from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to the level of the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. Further, the Christ who wept over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34) becomes a hypocrite for he has already decreed from all eternity that Jerusalem would not come to him, that he had previously decided to leave them in their lost condition, or even hardened their hearts against himself (Rom. 9:18).”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 12.33.3 (Oldfather, LCL).

⁴² Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 19.62.8 (Geer, LCL).

⁴³ Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16.

⁴⁴ W. C. Campbell-Jack, “Prolegomena for Reprobation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 61:1 (1989):42.