

Romans Chapter 11
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Romans Chapter 11

"Did God reject his people?"

In Chapter 11, of Romans, Paul deals very strongly with Israel -- its hope, its promises, and its relationship to the church. Twice, he asks the question, "Did God Reject His people?"

¹I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

In Paul's mind, he was still a Jew. To Paul, if God had rejected His people, he would have rejected Paul, too. His response to the question was an emphatic "**May it never be!**" For Paul, one could not be more of a Jew than he was (an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin). The Jews Paul so loved had rejected Jesus. They turned away from him and so Paul asks the question, when they did that, did God turn away from them?

²God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew

Those Jews God foreknew, he did not reject. Paul was one of them and there were many others making up the remnant who according to God's gracious choice, he set aside (kept for Himself). Paul knows that he is a part of the remnant that God has set aside for Himself (for his purpose). Across the centuries, many Jews have turned to the call of Christ. They are a part of this remnant just as was Paul.

Paul never forgot this fact. In each of his letters he stands in awe of the grace of God who took him, a blasphemer and persecutor of the church, and drew him close, changed his heart, and made him into a new creature in Christ. Paul is only one example of the many millions of Jews through the centuries who have come to a belief in Christ.

Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³"Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." ⁴But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." ⁵In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

Regardless, Paul indicates that whatever the circumstances, God stands as Sovereign and can hold back a remnant to salvation if he desires, just as in Elijah's time. In that time, Elijah thought he was the only one left, but God knew otherwise. He knew that even though Elijah saw only himself that God had set aside 7,000 for himself, keeping them from worshiping Baal. In his case Elijah could not see God's full plan and purpose, just as we cannot see it. He also was unable to understand God's power to accomplish His

desires, just as we are unable to understand. Lastly, Elijah forgot that if salvation is by works then it can't be by grace and that is what salvation is – God's Grace at work regardless of us, not because of us.

We believe we must somehow work our way into heaven and it just isn't that way. If God is going to save us, then it simply can't be based on works. It must be based on grace.

⁷What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

And so God reserves a remnant for Himself, even though thousands turn away because they have hardened themselves to Christ.

⁸just as it is written,

**"GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."**

⁹And David says,

**"LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP,
AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.
¹⁰"LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT,
AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."**

¹¹I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

These horrible words are what is in store for those who harden their hearts and live in unbelief. Those who hear the truth and fail to act on it, eventually lose their ability to discern the truth at all.

Everywhere Paul went, he first took his message to the Jews. The opportunity was given to them first. Only when they turned him away (by their transgression) did he take the good news to the Gentiles. Paul reasons that the Gentiles were given salvation to make the Jews jealous.

Perhaps our lives should reflect the love of God so strongly that every Jew we encounter will say, "Why do I not have what they possess?" Perhaps we should ask ourselves, "What is missing in our church to keep the Jews from being jealous of us?" Paul says that is God's intention.

¹²Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ¹³But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Paul's second argument is that Israel must ultimately return to God because worldwide blessing will come only when that happens. The blessing of our salvation includes the salvation of Jews who are moved to seek what we have. Through their acceptance comes reconciliation and life from the dead. If our riches come after the rejection by the Jews, what will the world be like when they come to see Christ for what he is?

^{16a}If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also;

This is Paul's third argument: The Jews would quickly understand that Paul is referring to the first fruit sacrifices made in the tabernacle here. The portion of dough (first piece) presented in the Temple as First Fruit served to make the entire lump holy (acceptable to God). Abraham was the first fruit (the lump of dough) and when God found him acceptable, the rest of the dough (his descendents) were acceptable also.

Paul's analogy continues with the grafted branch on the olive tree.

^{16b} and if the root is holy, the branches are too. ¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

It is the same with the olive tree. We as gentiles are grafted onto Abraham who is the root of the tree. Jews are not made Gentile when they accept Christ; we (gentiles) are made descendents of Abraham when we do. We are grafted onto the tree that has Abraham as the root. When a gentile becomes a Christian, in a sense, he/she becomes a son of Abraham and by extension a Jew. When a Jew becomes a Christian, they do not become a gentile. They already are the branches of the tree.

The sad thing is not all Jews will accept. In fact, many won't. They are the limbs that are broken off. We should not become conceited in our belief. As the branches that are the Jews can be broken off, so can the grafted branches (gentiles who become Christians).

C.S. Lewis put it this way:

"In a sense, the converted Jew is the only normal human being in the world." What do you think of that? He goes on, "Everyone else is, from one point of view, a special case dealt with under emergency conditions." That's how we got in. God sort of opened the back door and let us in as an emergency case. But the ones who really belong are the Jews. It is healthy for Gentile Christians to remember that. The Jews are not hanging around waiting for us to be nice to them. It is they who have been nice to us. We ought to remember that and respond with gratitude and humility to what God has done in placing us in this olive tree.

Paul's last argument is found in Verses 22-24:

²²Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you

were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

The olive tree is the position of the faith of Abraham, the position of receiving blessing from God through His grace, without any merit on our own part. Paul tells us we who were like a wild olive tree, with hard, shriveled up, bitter fruit, were taken and grafted into this rich olive tree. But what happens is contrary to what happens in nature.

When a nectarine branch is grafted into a peach tree, the branch still produces nectarines. The branch is fed by the tree, but it continues producing the fruit of its beginnings. The peach tree will grow nectarines on a nectarine branch, and plums on a plum branch, and so on. That is what happens according to nature. But God does a miracle with us. He changes us so that the fruit that comes forth is the fruit of the Spirit, and we begin to produce the rich, wonderful, fat fruit of the good olive tree in our lives. Paul argues if God can do that with bitter fruit such as we Gentile believers are, how much more will he produce richness with the true branches?

²⁵For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

**"THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."
²⁷"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."**

²⁸From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Paul reminds us that although we vary, God remains true to his promises. Israel has been hardened in their hearts, until the fullness of the gentiles comes in. At that time all Israel will be saved. God promised they would be his people and God does not revoke His promises.

³⁰For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³²For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

³⁴For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?

³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

God is Sovereign and remains Sovereign. We may or may not understand his ways, but that has no bearing on how he will fulfill his plans. He has shut up all (Jews) in disobedience (Hardening of their hearts) so that He may show mercy to all of them.