

## Romans Study Session 17 - Romans 11

So far, Paul has treated the problem of Israel in two ways. First, in chapter 9, he emphasized God's sovereignty in choosing a people for Himself for a special purpose. Second, in chapter 10, he dealt with Israel's failure to respond to God's righteousness and ended with the verdict that Israel was disobedient and obstinate.

With that said, now in chapter 11 Paul picks up his question again of "*Will Israel's sin and stubbornness defeat God's purpose?*" To this he adds another question that is comes from that question and is pressing which is "*Does God have a way to effectively deal with the problem of the disobedience of the Jews so that His purpose and will can stand?*" If God is to remain faithful to His promises, He's going to have to deal with the problems Paul has been stating concerning Israel's hardness of heart. Here in chapter 11, Paul is going to deal with Israel's past, present and future as well as the issue of the Gentile-majority church. There are four sections to this chapter. 1) The present state of Israel with a believing remnant but a majority hardened, 2) God's purpose in salvation history, 3) The future salvation of Israel, 4) God is awesome! Just to set some ground rules for tonight, many of these topics have already been covered and so they are review. If we end up going to fast, make sure you ask a question and we can cover a section in more detail.

### 1. The present state of Israel **[Read Romans 11:1-6]**

Paul clarifies his statements about God's promises to Israel here. While God is and will be seen as faithful to His promises to Israel, these promises never included a guarantee of salvation for every single physical descendant of Israel. Instead, His faithfulness is presently seen in the believing remnant.

Q: Why do you think Paul inserts a personal account in v.1? *(There could be lots of answers: 1) He was proving that one could be a Jew and a Christian at the same time, 2) This might prove he would be fair in his discussion of the Jews throughout this section of his letter, remembering that while the majority of the church was Gentile, he wanted to encourage the Jewish Christians of their place in God's history of salvation and the church, 3) He felt a kinship to Elijah in that he often felt alone and could empathize with Elijah's feelings, which he was about to bring up.)*

Q: What was Elijah's complaint to the Lord? *(v.3 - that he alone was the only faithful person left to God in Israel.)*

Q: Why do you think that Paul brought up this point in Elijah's life to the Jewish Christians? *(They would have felt the same way - isolated and out of step with the rest of their community both Jewish and Gentile church. Other answers possible)*

Q: What was God's response to Elijah? *(v.4 - God had kept 7,000 other men who had remained faithful to Him.)*

Elijah would have known many of these faithful 7,000 other men yet he alone was the

only one of them not in hiding from the evil queen Jezebel. He was the one taking the public point in matters of defending God's honor and reputation in Israel so he felt terribly alone. Notice that God doesn't deal with Elijah's feelings so much in this exchange but rather points out the truth that Elijah isn't really alone or God's only true worshiper in Israel. What is important is that God never allowed His faithful people to be close to extinction. The remnant were like Elijah in this matter. The numbers were not the important thing; the important thing was that God protected His faithful remnant so that this faith could continue for His purposes.

Q: How did those who are part of the believing remnant become part of the remnant? (*v.5 - they chose to receive God's grace*)

The better translation for v.5 is "choise of grace" not "God's gracious choice". It more accurately describes the rest of the last two chapters dealing with grace. God offers grace and some receive it and some do not. Paul ends this section with the statement that grace and works are mutually exclusive ways of establishing a relationship with God.

Q: What does v.6 tell us about the nature of grace? (*It is a purely a gift. There is no works or actions on our part that can bring about what grace brings about. For grace to be grace, it has to be a free gift from start to finish. Any answer along this line works.*)

### **[Read Romans 11:7-10]**

Next Paul gets into Israel's current (to his time) situation. (However, what was true in Paul's day and time is also still true at this point in history.) What's important is that he's comparing the response of the remnant to that of the majority of the nation of Israel who has hardened their heart against God's grace. To make his point concerning the remnant and the rest of the Jews, Paul relates to them three Old Testament passages. The first is Deuteronomy 29:4. Here he says that these people saw with their own eyes the miracles of the Exodus and the provision of God in the wilderness yet this didn't lead them to have a loving, trusting heart towards the Lord. The second verse mentioned is Isaiah 29:10. God gave them faithful prophets yet the people closed their ears to the voice of God and as a result God sent a spirit of stupor upon them. The word "stupor" means prickling - the prickling as when a hand or foot falls asleep. Their minds had fallen asleep. This was a judicial punishment by God against Israel for their failure to use their God-given faculties of sight and hearing to perceive God's power and thus give Him glory. In v.7 the word "hardened" is a different word than was used back in 9:18. This word carried the same negative moral meaning as in 9:18 but this one also was used to describe a broken bone set improperly and allowed to heal in that position. A knob or growth would come from the bone preventing the joint from working properly and obscuring one's vision of the bone past the new obstructive growth. So this hardening also blocks true sight. The last of the Old Testament passages is from David in Psalm 69:22-3. David is speaking of his suffering the reproach of his enemies which are also the enemies of the Lord. Their festivals were nothing but occasions for additional blasphemies. Thus their table or festival was used by God to entrap them. So in this we see the two states of Israel: the believing remnant and the unbelieving rest of the nation, which was the vast majority.

2. God's purpose in salvation history **[Read Romans 11:11-15]** This is a return to the nation of Israel as a whole rather than the remnant at this point. Paul's going to explain the purpose of the hardening on the larger group of Israel and answer the question of whether it leads them to a hopeless situation or not.

Q: What was the posture of Israel cited by Paul in the opening of v.11? (*they stumbled but did not fall*)

This means that the nation stumbled over the grace of God and God's plan brought about by His Messiah but since the nation did not fall, it shows that Paul holds out divine hope for his countrymen coming to salvation at some point. This is foreshadowing.

Q: What was the result of Israel's rejection of the gospel? (*v.11 - the Gentiles came to salvation.*)

Q: What was one of the results of the Gentiles accepting the gospel? (*v.11 - it made Israel jealous of the Gentile standing before God*)

Next Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions and statements to make his point about Israel may have stumbled but didn't fall, thus there is hope for them in a larger sense in God's big plan for the world.

Q: In v.12, what did the transgressions and failure of Israel lead to for the rest of the world? (*riches*)

Q: What do you think is meant by riches? What kind of riches? (*the riches of God's grace and mercy and all that was mentioned in chapters 5-8*)

If the failure of Israel to receive the Messiah and their hardened hearts led to the Gentiles coming into the riches of God through salvation, just think of how glorious it will be when Israel does come to their senses.

Q: Why did Paul want to move Israel to jealousy? (*v.14 - for their salvation*)

Q: If their rejection leads to reconciliation of the world to God, what would their acceptance bring? (*v.15 - life from the dead*)

This isn't speaking of a literal resurrection here but rather an Israel, the nation, who is now alive in Christ, full of faith in God and ready to take up the mission God originally gave to her. It envisions a world-wide quickening of the Holy Spirit among Israel.

In this next section Paul is going to use two illustrations to describe the God's purpose and give a warning about the Gentiles becoming arrogant in their current position.

**[Read Romans 11:16-24]**

The first illustration is just saying that if the remnant is holy, is rightly situation with God, then the rest of the lump of dough will follow suit in time. Paul is looking forward to a rejuvenated Israel in the future - once the first piece of dough “rises fully”.

The next illustration to describe God’s purpose in salvation history is that of an olive tree. It has become unfruitful and thus, the tree keeper cuts off some of the unproductive branches and grafts into the root system some wild but living branches. In this Israel is the cultivated branches while the Gentiles are the wild olive branches. The root is the base of the patriarchs which were established by God’s covenant.

Q: What attitude are the Gentiles to avoid given this information? (*v.18 - they are not to be boastful or proud of their current position*)

Q: What are the two reasons given for why the Gentiles should not be arrogant? (*v.18 - the root, the covenants made to the Jewish fathers, supports them. They do not support the root. v.21 - Also, if God didn’t spare the original native branches, He will not spare the wild ones if they should fail to be fruitful.*)

Important note here. In v.18 and elsewhere in this section, “YOU” is not speaking of an individual but rather of an individual race of people. Paul clearly pointed out that he was speaking to the entire body of Gentiles in the Roman church. Their prominence in the Christian community may not last or be a permanent way of things.

In v.22 kindness and severity are both mentioned. These are both attributes of God’s nature. Israel has been experiencing severity in their current situation while the Gentiles have experienced kindness. However, the conditions can be reversed. It is crucial to understand that if the tables do get turned, it is not due to God and His actions but rather due to the nature of human response to the gospel. He’s saying that Jews, large swaths of the nation, may start coming to salvation while the Gentiles quit being responsive to the gospel. That would be the cause of the reversal, not God’s heart. Normally, one would never graft an unproductive branch back onto the healthy root but in this case, since God can do all things, He can bring even the dead branches back to life (remember, this isn’t individuals but rather nations that are being discussed - entire races of humans). Another important point here is that the return of the Jews in no way comes to supplant the Gentiles. Both races can share the blessings of grace simultaneously. In fact, they will do just this as we’ll see.

### 3. The future salvation of Israel [**Read Romans 11: 25-32**]

This section is the climax of chapters 9-11. The same mercy which was received by the Gentiles will at some point in the future be received by those Jews who are now disobedient.

“mystery” - Activity of God in salvation made known by direct revelation, things hidden by God in the past but now He has uncovered. The mystery is that the hardening was limited in duration.

Q: When will the partial hardening of Israel be removed? (*v.25 when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*)

Partial hardening refers to not all Israel was hard hearted in the first place. There was a believing remnant to work in the world who was not hardened. This remnant was the exception to the general rule. The fulness of the Gentiles refers to a time when the number of Gentiles who are going to get saved, get saved. When that number is complete, then the Jews will begin to come to grace in large numbers.

V. 26 - "all Israel" does not mean every single Jew in the world. It is speaking of the nation as a whole who is now opposes too the current remnant. Like everyone else, these Jews will come to God and His righteousness through putting their faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. There will be large numbers of Jews getting saved and coming into the church rather than the small number of Messianic Jews we see now. *(I've mentioned this before about the book of Romans - there is very little talk of the end times. However, as we've seen, there are a few morsels of truth that pertain to the last days, even though they aren't prefaced directly as pertaining to the final days. This is one of those instances. Paul is discussing God's plan and how Israel is not rejected by God and will in fact, many Jews will come to salvation before the return of Jesus. This is a sign for those who Christians who are still alive at this time when they see a major Jewish revival, they can know the end is very near.)*

### **[Ephesians 2:11-18]**

In v.28 the word "enemies" denotes the condition of Israel before God, not God's sentiments of animosity towards the nation. The choice mentioned in v.28 is the sovereign choice of God when He chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the patriarchs of His people. For the sake of the covenant God made with the patriarchs, God still loves Israel and desires for them to come to Him in salvation.

In v.29 - "irrevocable" is the first word in the Greek sentence making it emphatic. *"Irrevocable are the gifts and calling of God."*

Q: Why would Paul put v.29 in this passage? What does it mean in the big picture of what Paul's talking about in chapters 9-11? *(It means that God is completely faithful. When He enters into a covenant or makes a promise, it will be fulfilled completely. God will not take back His word. Thus in this context, the promises made to Israel will be fulfilled by many coming to salvation at some point in the future.)*

Q: In v.30, who is the race that was once disobedient that Paul is addressing here? *(the Gentiles)*

It is God's mercy that is the needed factor for anyone's salvation. As the Gentiles outnumbered the Jewish believers in the early church at Rome, this was given to keep the Gentiles from inflating their egos in their position of grace. It was God's mercy, not any goodness in the Gentiles themselves, that led them to salvation.

If you go back to the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, a grand council of the apostles and early church leaders was convened to discern whether or not God was actually bringing Gentiles to salvation or not. There was an open debate as to whether or not the Jewish laws and customs were necessary for salvation. The verdict rendered gave great encouragement to Paul, his mission to the Gentiles and to the Gentile converts themselves. At the same time, this

same verdict cemented Jewish opposition to Gentile converts and the message of grace.

Q: Why has God shut up all people in disobedience? (v. 32 - *so that He might show mercy to all. This verse is just another way of saying the truth already mentioned in Romans 3:23.*)

4. God is awesome! **[Read Romans 11:33-36]**

**[Read Isaiah 55:1-13]** - In this passage, sinful man is urged to lift up his heart to God and find mercy. Instead of being vindictive, God is merciful and gracious. His plans defy the abilities of the human mind His ways surpass the perception of man to trace them out or fully comprehend them in scope. His wisdom is far above our like the heaven are above the earth. This passage reminds us of what Paul is discussing at the end of Romans 11 when he is concluding this section on the problem of Israel, which is God's chosen people. No human would have done things this way but no human thinks or acts like God - for the best for all mankind.

Now in v.36, he is making a personal appeal to individuals. This applies to all those whose lives please God. this life has its source in God, lives by His resources, and returns to Him when the course of that life has been run. This conclusion is written to lead readers to be in total awe of God's extraordinary plan for the world He created.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?