

Romans XV

Introduction

In this part of chapter 11 Paul confronts the problem of Jewish unbelief. The idea that the Jewish people would reject God and doom themselves to eternal punishment is baffling. The issue of Jewish unbelief had particular relevance to the Gentiles. Paul assured the Gentiles that God had not cast away His Chosen people and He would not cast away the Gentile believers. The believers thought that if God could do away with his Chosen people in the old covenant, could He do it again with them in the new covenant if He chose to. And so he assured them this was not the case. In the new covenant He would use Gentiles as well in His redemptive plan for mankind.

Romans 11:1 *I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.* The concept of a remnant has always been part of God's redemptive plan. Paul was a living example that God had not rejected His people. Paul had moved away from God's plan and strived to live completely by the Law and tried to be righteous by good works in fulfilling the Law. He was so zealous for the Law that he had tried to persecute Christians and then God met him on the Damascus road. God had not cast him away but turned Paul life around, put him back on track and brought him in line with God's sovereign plan.

Romans 11:2 *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel,* Paul used the illustration of Elijah in the OT, who stood against the godless king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. The people of Israel worshipped Baal and Asherah and aggressively persecuted anyone who didn't serve them. Elijah cursed the land to receive no rain for three and a half years, which humiliated Ahab, Jezebel and all of the 450 false prophets. Elijah challenged Ahab and the 450 false prophets. God proved himself to be the true God and the others were proven to be false. Elijah ordered the false prophets to be put to death. But after this amazing victory, when Ahab and Jezebel threatened Elijah with death, he became fearful and ran and hid. In his solitude we read he cried out to God and said ³ *“Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”?*

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Paul reminded them of God's response in Verse 4 *But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."* God announced to Elijah that he was not on his own but that He had reserved for Himself a remnant of seven thousand men, who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Even though God brought justice on the rebellious majority of Israel He sovereignly preserved a faithful minority. That's what God does? Preserves a remnant.

Romans 11:5-6 *Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.* Paul could have chosen any one of Israel's history to illustrate God's preserving a remnant. So how is Elijah's particular experience the same as Paul's and ours? Just like in Elijah's day, outward appearance would suggest that all of Israel had rejected God and is forever lost. The situation today is so desperate that we too might think that the nation of Israel is far from God and there is no future. God encouraged the dejected prophet Elijah in three ways:

Firstly God assured Elijah that the majority opinion doesn't dictate Israel's future; God will see to that. The majority opinion does not represent the true Israel: God recognizes only the faithful, whether their number is great or small. A democracy is where the majority vote defines the nation. A theocracy is defined by the will of God.

Secondly the Lord gave Elijah work to do. He would use the prophet in a number of ways that would wipe the rebellious majority from the Promised Land (1 Kings 19:15-17).

Thirdly God promised that He would preserve seven thousand people who had silently refused to follow the majority into apostasy. They would become the remnant and they would reap the covenant promises. Paul recalled the experience of Elijah because it perfectly illustrated a remnant of people to carry forward God's plan. Today, a faithful minority of Jews embrace the Messiah.

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The Lord always fulfills His promises. There will be a remnant that will receive Jesus as their Messiah and King.

Romans 11:7-14 *What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.* ⁸ *Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, □Eyes that they should not see□And ears that they should not hear,□To this very day.”* ⁹ *And David says “Let their table become a snare and a trap,□A stumbling block and a recompense to them.* ¹⁰ *Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,□And bow down their back always.”* ¹¹ *I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.* ¹² *Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!* ¹³ *For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,* ¹⁴ *if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.* Paul made reference here in verse 9 to Psalm 69:2-24. Here David called for eternal punishment on those who rejected the anointed king. Paul referred to David’s poem to remind the readers that this was a time of discipline for the nation of Israel that would eventually come to an end, at which time faithful individuals were rewarded while faithless individuals received eternal punishment. Paul was saying that the Jews were not permanently cast out but rather temporarily set aside.

This period of time allows Gentiles the opportunity to hear the good news and to respond to it through salvation. This was God’s plan from the beginning. The Gentiles are to enjoy a life changing relationship with God that the Jews will become zealous to regain what they are missing. The Greek word Paul used here for jealousy is to provoke zeal. Zeal will prompt them to do something about their situation.

This was Paul’s desire. While he dedicated His life to proclaiming the gospel, he longed for his Jewish brothers and sisters to become zealous for the righteousness that comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. When their blindness ends they will worship the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of

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lords in their own land. Jesus Christ will be crowned as the supreme leader of the world in the city of Jerusalem, where He will rule over every nation. At a future date, the remnant will arise and claim all that God has promised the nation of Israel. There will be a remnant of Jews to receive their Messiah.

God does His best work through a remnant, a faithful minority. The Bible is filled with examples of how God deliberately stacked the odds against Himself to reassure His people. The example we have seen today with Elijah against Baal, when he doused the sacrifice with water. God consumed the sacrifice and the water. Sometimes we face impossible situations where the odds may be stacked against us. This may just be the opportunity to demonstrate His desire to bless us. God always keeps His promises!

Having assured Gentile believers of their place in God's family as adopted sons and daughters, having described the temporary setting aside of the Jews, Paul recognizes the potential for a new kind of danger. Gentiles now enjoy the place of honor in God's plan to Redeem mankind and so Paul gave his Gentile readers a dose of humility so they don't become conceited or proud. We must be careful not to become conceited or proud.

Romans 11:18 *For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.* ¹⁷ *And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,* ¹⁸ *do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.* Paul used this illustration of olives that everyone in the Mediterranean world would appreciate: That of cultivating olive trees and the practice of grafting. Ancient growers discovered that the roots of wild olive trees could tolerate harsh conditions, while cultivated trees could not. So they combined the best elements of both the strong root system and the delicious fruit from a cultivated tree.

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In Paul's illustration, he gave the image of a surprising twist, where wild olive branches draw nourishment from the sap and roots from a cultivated stock. This is a dramatic picture of grace. We could go into a lot of detail here but to summarise these verses Paul was saying here that God did not set aside the Jew and then include the Gentile because one was better than the other or more useful than the other. God grafted Gentiles into the plan to show them grace. And because grace is always unmerited, no one can look down on another.

Romans 11:19-24 *You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.”* ²⁰ *Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.* ²¹ *For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.* ²² *Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.* ²³ *And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.* ²⁴ *For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?* Branches are grafted in only by faith for both Gentile and Jew. These verses talk about the Church and the nation of Israel. When Jesus returns as Messiah-King and reign over all the world, the Gentiles will share the blessings and enjoy the privileges of Jesus ruling this world alongside the nation of Israel.

Romans 11:25-29 *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* ²⁶ *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, □ And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;”* ²⁷ *For this is My covenant with them, □ When I take away their sins.”* ²⁸ *Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.* ²⁹ *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* When Paul talked about All Israel it is not determined by numbers, but by belief. God recognizes only the faithful, whether their number

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is great or small. And so at a specific time in the future when all individuals have believed, that are going to put their faith in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile, a new era will begin. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem; the promised land.

Paul taught us that we must not judge the people of Israel as we see them now. We need to see that they too have a place in God's redemptive plan for mankind. We should pray for them, that they will come to faith. It is good to remind ourselves at times that as Christians we should not be conceited or full of pride. We have no superiority. Remember we are grafted in.

This place of honour we enjoy comes with great privileges and responsibility. We have the presence of the Almighty God living within us. He will transform us from within and He has guaranteed us victory over death.

We have the responsibility to be good stewards of the privileges we have been given and to be living invitations to receive Jesus and His grace. Luke 12:48 is a sobering reminder of our responsibility *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*