



## By Grace, God Has Preserved a Remnant in Israel Romans 11:1-10

### Introduction

Romans 9 through 11 reveal Paul's concern for the people of Israel who have failed to believe the gospel. But even though Paul speaks mainly of Israel in these chapters, his teachings and applications are for us as well. Here are some of the important truths Paul teaches in these chapters:

- God's promises do not fail;
- God's purpose is worked out according to His choice and call;
- God is sovereign over all;
- Righteousness comes from God alone;
- Faith comes through hearing the word of God;
- Salvation is assured to those who call upon the name of the Lord

God had chosen Israel and bestowed many privileges upon His people. Did their rejection of the gospel mean that the word of God had failed? Not at all. Paul explains that from the beginning, God has chosen and called those who were to be the recipients of His promises. Furthermore, God's choice was not on the basis of good works, but by His free and sovereign grace. He chose Isaac and not Ishmael, *In Isaac your seed shall be called* (Romans 9:7). He chose Jacob and not Esau, *Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated* (Romans 9:12). If this seems unfair, remember that God is sovereign and He is righteous in His dealings with mankind. All are sinners who neither seek God nor do good (Romans 3:11-12). No one deserves God's mercy. God is our Maker and He is free to have mercy or to harden individuals and nations according to His divine purpose, *not of works but of Him who calls* (Romans 9:11).

In chapter 10, Paul explains Israel's problem. They rejected God's righteousness, preferring to pursue their own righteousness. They failed to recognize that righteousness comes from God alone. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). Israel was intent upon striving for good works rather than humbly placing their faith in Christ. The problem was not that they had not heard or did not know. They had heard the gospel and knew God's plan according to their Scriptures. However, they had been *a disobedient and contrary people* (Romans 10:21). They had not responded when God stretched out His hands to them. Israel, as a whole, failed to believe God and did not call upon Him.

Now, in chapter 11, Paul reveals that, in spite of this, God has not rejected His people fully or finally. In His

mercy, He has preserved an elect remnant by grace. *Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded* (11:7). The elect are saved, *not of works, but of Him who calls* (Romans 9:11). The rest are blinded, just as was prophesied in the Scriptures.

### Outline of Romans 11:1-10

- I. God Has Not Rejected His People - Romans 11:1-4
- II. There is a Remnant - Romans 11:5-10

### I. God Has Not Rejected His People - Romans 11:1-4

In light of Israel's disobedience, as portrayed in the closing verses of chapter 10, Paul brings up the question, *Has God cast away His people?* His answer is very strong: *Certainly not!* He then gives two proofs as evidence that he is correct: himself and 7,000 faithful men of Elijah's day.

- A. Paul is a living example - Romans 11:1-2

*For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.* Paul presents himself as "exhibit A" to prove that God had not rejected His people. He was one of God's people, an Israelite according to the flesh. He was descended from Abraham by the tribe of Benjamin, the only one of Jacob's sons born in the promised land (Genesis 35:16-18), and the only tribe to remain faithful to the family of King David when the other ten tribes rebelled (1 Kings 12:16-21). He was a true Jew through and through! He was a zealous Jew who persecuted Christians with all his might. In his letter to the Galatians (1:13-14), Paul explains how he persecuted the church in his zeal for the traditions of his fathers. Paul's zeal was in opposition to God, but God overturned his rebelliousness and misdirected zeal and saved him. In a letter to his fellow worker, Timothy, Paul wrote, *I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief* (1 Timothy 1:13-15).

God saved Paul who was among the most disobedient and contrary of all Jews. Paul was both a Jew and a

Christian, living proof that Jews could be saved. *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew* (11:2).

B. Elijah and the 7,000 are an ancient example - Romans 11:2-4

Remembering Scripture, Paul goes back in the history of Israel to give another example which shows that *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew*.

1. Elijah pleaded with God against Israel - 11:2

Elijah was a mighty prophet of God who lived in the ninth century B.C. during the reign of the wicked King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Paul's readers would have been familiar with Elijah and his situation. Elijah thought he was the only one in all of Israel who still served God. He was discouraged and complained to God because the Israelites had torn down God's altars and built altars to false gods. Then they had killed the prophets who warned them against graven images. Elijah lived in a dangerous time for God's prophets. He told the Lord, *I alone am left, and they seek my life*.

2. *The divine response* - 11:3-4

God's answer to Elijah was, *I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal*. Baal was a pagan god which enticed Israel to sin. Many Israelites had submitted to idolatry and worshiped Baal. But there were seven thousand who had not. There were seven thousand whom God had set apart for Himself. The words, *I have reserved for myself*, show that God is the one who acted to set the seven thousand apart. "It was by His special influence and agency, and not owing to themselves" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane). The reason the seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal was not their own righteousness. It was by God's grace! They were another proof that God had not *cast away His people whom He foreknew* (11:2).

## II. There is a Remnant - Romans 11:5-10

Paul has shown that God remained faithful to Israel by the preservation of a remnant. Even though the nation as a whole was *disobedient and contrary* (Romans 10:21) in Elijah's day, God did not reject the whole nation, but preserved a remnant of seven thousand faithful men. As there was a remnant then, there was also a remnant in Paul's day and Paul was part of it.

A. *The remnant* - 11:5

Paul has already shown that the concept of the *remnant* had been foretold in the Old Testament. Romans 9:27 and 29 are quotations from the prophet Isaiah, *Though*

*the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved* (Isaiah 10:22-23), and *Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom and we would have been made like Gomorrah* (Isaiah 1:9).

The idea of a *remnant* is first seen in Scripture in Genesis 45:7 where Joseph explains to his brothers who had sold him into slavery in Egypt, *God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance* (NASB). Later, in Deuteronomy, the concept of the *remnant* is evident in Moses' warnings to Israel. Because of their disobedience they would be scattered among the nations, but God would bring the obedient back from captivity to possess the land of their fathers (4:27-31, 28:62-68, and 30:1-10). Later on, the prophets spoke of the *remnant* as those chosen by God to be preserved from the impending doom of the nation (Amos 5:15 and Micah 2:12, 4:6-7). The apostle Paul applies the teachings about the *remnant* to Israel at this present time. Just as in Elijah's day, the nation as a whole was disobedient, but there was a *remnant* who did obey. This shows that God had not rejected His people (11:2).

B. *Chosen by grace* (English Standard Version) - 11:5-6

The remnant were chosen *by grace*. If it is *by grace*, it means that God's choice (or election, NKJ) of the remnant was not the result of any inherent good foreseen in them or of any good works they had done. God did not choose them because they deserved to be chosen. "It was an unconditional choice, resulting from the sovereign free favor of God" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).

1. *If by grace, then it is no longer of works* - 11:6

If election (God's choice) is by grace, then it cannot be based on works. Grace and works are opposites and cannot be reconciled. As Paul has already pointed out, the one who works receives a wage and not grace (Romans 4:4). Therefore, if election is by grace, it cannot be by works. If grace comes by works, it is no longer grace; it is a wage.

2. *If it is of works it is no longer grace* - 11:6

This is just a reversal of the idea Paul has just stated, and it brings the same conclusion. Paul is saying that once we have come to see that salvation is by grace there is no longer any place for works. "If works have any place at all...then there is no point in speaking about grace. If we do...then we have changed the meaning of grace and grace wouldn't be grace at all" (Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

C. *Israel has not obtained what it seeks* - Romans 11:7

Israel as a nation had not obtained the righteousness it was seeking to establish (as in Romans 9:31 and 10:3). The reason they had not is because they were seeking to establish it by works of the law.

1. *But the elect have obtained it* - 11:7

*The elect* are those who are chosen by God's grace. They are the remnant of which Paul has been speaking. They obtained righteousness, not by works, but by God's grace.

2. *And the rest were blinded* (some versions say *hardened*)- 11:7

The elect received the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4), but the rest did not. Paul explains the reason: they *were blinded*. The Greek verb translated *blinded* in the New King James Version literally means "*hardened*" or "rendered insensible". Because of the hardness of their own hearts in rejecting the *word of Christ* (Romans 10:17), because they were a *disobedient and obstinate people* (Romans 10:21), they "grew immune to God's word and deaf to God's call" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul). As Paul described in Romans 1:24-28, *God gave them over* to their own blindness, rebellion, and depravity which is sin. They sought acceptance through their own self-righteousness and "incurred instead that hardening which follows self-will" (A Commentary on the Holy Bible, J.R. Dummelow). This was foreseen by the Old Testament prophets.

a. God gave them *a spirit of stupor* - 11:8

The Jews were blinded in accordance with what was written in Isaiah 29 and Deuteronomy 29 (quoted in 11:8). God gave Israel *eyes to see not and ears to hear not* (NASB). Their hardening was a deafness and blindness toward God which was God's judgment for their refusal to hear and see. They had not treated God's word properly. They had distorted it and denied its truth. Consequently, they became caught in their own false beliefs. When the truth was pointed out to them, they took offense and failed to see their error. This is a lesson all of us should take to heart.

b. Their blessings were turned into curses - 11:9-10

Paul quotes from Psalm 69:22-23, *Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always*. Psalm 69 is David's urgent prayer when he was in dire distress and in danger of death. He cried out to God to rescue him and to send retribution on his enemies.

The New Testament writers saw much of Psalm 69 as descriptive of Christ's sufferings. In that case, the passage Paul quotes, which directly follows the description of Christ's agony on the cross, could be taken as judgments which should come upon the enemies of Christ. The judgments include having their place of peace, pleasure and safety, *their table*, turned into a curse, *a snare and a trap, a stumbling block*. This would be their recompense; Instead of comfort and security, they would reap ruin. It would be what they deserved for their rejection of Christ. The second judgment was *Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always*. This is a double curse. Those who have darkened eyes and whose backs are bent over can no longer straighten their bodies to look up, and even if they could, they could not see God. The consequence is, "They no longer observe the righteousness which looks down from heaven, but they regard only their own righteousness, after which they seek and in which they trust" (Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther.)

### Application

Paul makes it clear in Romans 11 that God chooses to save people by His grace. The apostle Paul sets himself as a clear example. He was not saved because he was *an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin* (Romans 11:1). He was not saved because of his great zeal for what he believed was right. His zeal was misdirected and he was the *chief of sinners* (1 Timothy 1:15). Nor was Paul saved by any works that he did. The apostle Paul obtained mercy and was saved by nothing but the grace of God. Will you humble yourself before God and confess that your own righteousness is nothing but *filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6)? Will you submit to His righteousness by faith?



## QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. a. What is the most important thing you have learned about Israel in Romans 9-11?  
  
b. What lessons can you take from this for your own life?
  
2. What do you think is the most important thing you have learned about God from studying Romans 9-11?
  
3. What was interesting to you concerning the *remnant*?

### Day Two: Read Romans 11:11-15.

4. a. In verse 11, Paul is continuing to speak of Israel. What question does he put forth concerning them?  
  
b. What is his emphatic answer?  
  
c. From Romans 9:32-33, what had Israel stumbled over and why?
  
5. a. What was God's purpose in Israel's stumbling? Give verse.  
  
b. How had this been foretold in the Scriptures? See Deuteronomy 32:21 (as quoted by Paul in Romans 10:19).
  
6. a. To whom does Paul speak beginning in Romans 11:13?  
  
b. What did Paul say would magnify his ministry to the Gentiles? Why? Give verse.

### Day Three: Read Romans 11:16-24.

7. What two picture lessons does Paul give in verse 16?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. a. In this passage, who is *the wild olive tree* and who is the *cultivated olive tree*?  
  
b. What has God done with the *cultivated olive tree*?

- 
- c. Why were certain branches broken off and others grafted in?
  
  - d. What is Paul's purpose in telling this parable of the olive tree (verses 17-21)?
  
  - e. ♥ (Heart Question) Is any of this meaningful to you in a personal way? If so, explain why.
9. a. What two attributes of God are evident in Paul's parable of the olive tree? Give verse.
- b. Who had experienced each of these?
- c. What is the warning?

**Day Four: Read Romans 11: 25-27.**

10. a. Why is Paul now going to share a *mystery* with his readers? Give two reasons.
- b. Use what you learn in Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:7, and Ephesians 3:3-5 to explain what Paul means by *mystery*.
11. a. What do you think Paul means by being *wise in your own opinion*?
- b. What 21st century examples can you think of which might illustrate this?
12. What is the *mystery* Paul reveals here?
13. a. What is the good news Paul states in the first part of verse 26?
- b. How do the Scripture quotations Paul uses reinforce his statement and explain how Israel will be saved?

**Day Five: Read Romans 11:28-32.**

14. a. In what sense is Israel an enemy of God? See also Romans 10:21 and 11:19-20.
- b. In what sense is Israel beloved? See also Deuteronomy 10:15 and Romans 11:5.

15. a. What do you learn from this passage concerning God's gifts and calling? Give verse.

b. How does Numbers 23:19 further explain this?

16. How does Paul describe both Gentiles and Jews as part of God's purpose?

**Day Six: Read Romans 11:33-36.**

17. a. Why does Paul break into praise for God?

b. What do the following Scripture passages teach about God's riches, wisdom and knowledge?

1 Samuel 2:3

1 Kings 8:39

Psalm 147:5

Proverbs 3:19-20

Romans 2:4

Ephesians 3:8

18. a. How would you answer the questions in Romans 11:34-35? Please answer with full sentences and not with just a yes or no.

b. ♥ (Heart Question) What does this mean to you?

19. Why should the *glory* be to God *forever*? Try to use what Paul says in this passage for your answer.

20. What do you think is the most important thing you learned in the lesson this week? (Use other side of page if you like.)