

Romans 11:1-10
God Has Not Rejected His People, Has He?

Having completed Romans 9 & 10, we arrive at chapter 11

- This is the final chapter in this trilogy within the book of Romans which deals very specifically with the Jewish people

Broadly speaking, Romans 9 & 10 have two different perspectives

- Romans 9 stressed Divine sovereignty in electing
- Romans 10 stressed human responsibility in believing

All has not been positive for Israel, however

- Paul has had some harsh words for the nation

Consider some selected passages

- 9:6-7, “**But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: ‘THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED’”**
- 9:30-32, “**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone”**
- 10:2-3, “**For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”**
- 10:21, “**ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE”**

What are we to make of this?

- Is God finished with Israel?
- Has God moved on to Plan B?

Some think so

- Some Christians subscribe to what is called covenant theology, also known as replacement theology

Those who believe in covenant theology say that God has abandoned His promises to Israel

- Instead, those promises will come true of the Church, not the nation of Israel

This is a pretty serious leap

- It suggests that we can’t take God’s covenants in the Old Testament seriously and literally

For example, the specific promises given to Abraham weren’t really designed to be fulfilled in Israel

- Instead, the Church will inherit these promises

I am not trying to make light of this issue

- Perhaps there are some of you who lean toward covenant theology

God hasn’t replaced Israel with the Church

- These are two separate entities in God’s mind

This morning, I pray that God will give us understanding as we look at the question, “Has God rejected His people?”

- This is a very important question

If God has rejected His people, the Jews, then frankly God can't be trusted

- He is a liar
- He is not faithful
- He is not trustworthy

“But Kevin, those are some strong words!”

- Yes, they are designed to be strong

If God has not been faithful in even one area, then He is not trustworthy in any area

- God's faithfulness is at stake
- His Word is at stake

So let's read and heed the Word of God carefully this morning

- Paul will be our tour guide
- Pay close attention to his words

Let's read Romans 11:1-10

The question begs to be asked, “Has God rejected His people?”

- Throughout history, some have said, “Yes”
- Many have said, “No”
- Some have said, “I am not sure”

These ten (10) verses give three (3) proofs of why God has not rejected His people

- The conversion of Paul (11:1)
- The remnant of grace (11:2-6)
- The condition of Israel (11:7-10)

I. The conversion of Paul (11:1)

1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He?

This opening question in verse 1 is really the theme of Romans 11

- This is the main point that Paul wants to emphasize in this chapter

The question strikes us as being blunt and to the point

- Paul wants us to consider the awesomeness of the issue

The word for “**rejected**” is a strong word

- It implies a pushing aside
- It can refer to a rejection or repudiation

In the book of Acts, Stephen writes of how Moses had killed an Egyptian

- The next day, Moses tried to intervene between two men who were fighting

The Bible says, “**But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US?’**” (Acts 7:27)

- “**pushed away**” is the same word used here in Romans 11:1

Another passage in Acts bears our attention, “**And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’**” (13:44-46)

- The Jews rejected the Word of the Gospel
- So Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles

Is this what God has done to His own people, the Jews?

- Has He pushed them away?
- Has He rejected them?

May it never be!

Paul answers this strong accusation with a resounding, “No!”

- In the Greek language, this was the absolutely strongest way to negate a statement
- The King James uses the phrase, “God forbid”

It was Paul’s way of emphatically denying the thought of God rejecting His people

- It was unthinkable

Paul knew that God has not abandoned His people

- God still had plans for Israel

Listen to these verses about God’s commitment to His people

- “**For the LORD will not abandon His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance**” (Ps 94:14)
- “**For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.**” (1 Sam 12:22)

Here in verse 1, Paul uses his own testimony as evidence that God has not rejected His people

Let me issue forth this caution

- By saying that God has not rejected His people, this does not imply that all physical descendants of Abraham will be spared the wrath of God
- Remember Romans 9:6, “***it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel***”

Quite contrary

- Many physical Jews will suffer eternal punishment precisely because of their rejection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ

What Paul is trying to emphasize, however, is that God has not completely rejected the entire nation of Israel

- There will be a remnant who is spared

So running side-by-side with rejection is the reminder of election¹

For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham

Paul states very emphatically, “I too am an Israelite”

- He does not refer to himself as a Jew
- But rather as “an Israelite”

There were two ways of being identified as an Israelite

- Through blood – being a physical descendant of Abraham
- Through faith – Gentile proselytes could become followers of Yahweh

A Jew was someone who could trace his/her physical ancestry back to Abraham

- It was a physical likeness that dealt with lineage

But an Israelite was one who sought to be like Abraham

- This was a spiritual likeness that dealt with faith

All Jews are not Israelites

- But all Israelites are Jews

of the tribe of Benjamin.

The apostle also says of himself that he is “of the tribe of Benjamin”

- Why does Paul emphasize this?

Paul wants to highlight something very important about his heritage

- He wasn't just an Israelite
- He wasn't just a descendant of Abraham
- He was of the tribe of Benjamin

After the death of Solomon, the united kingdom divided²

- 10 tribes broke off and formed the northern kingdom of Israel

The only tribe that remained faithful to Judah in the southern kingdom was Benjamin

- This tribe was highly respected

From the tribe of Benjamin came many esteemed Jews

- Esther
- Mordecai
- Jonathan
- King Saul

Could it be that Paul's parents named him after the most recognized Benjaminite?

- King Saul himself

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Romans*, 359.

² Steven A. Kreloff, *God's Plan for Israel*, 72.

Benjamin was also the youngest son of Jacob's most beloved wife, Rachel

- Benjamin was the only son of Jacob born in the land of promise³

Paul wasn't the person voted, "Most likely to become a Christian," was he?

- As a matter of fact, he was probably the least likely

Listen to his words in 1 Timothy, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1:12-13)

- God worked in his life despite his past
 - o Blasphemer
 - o Persecutor
 - o Violent aggressor

Paul never forgot what God did in his life

- It seems like he never took the Gospel for granted

God could not have rejected His people

- Because Paul himself, a Jew, was a Christian!

God had saved this wretched Christ-rejecting Jew

- And He would save others like him

God's promises to Israel don't include all individual Jews

- Likewise, His rejection and judgment on Israel don't include all individuals⁴

First, consider the conversion of Paul

- **God was still saving Jews**

II. The remnant of grace (11:2-6)

2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.

The second reason why it is absurd to insinuate that God has rejected His people is given here in verses 2-6

Paul's statement in verse 2 is simple, and to the point, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew"

- The word "rejected" and the phrase "His people" are carried over from verse 1

The new element is the statement of foreknowledge

- "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Rom 8:29-30)

Foreknowledge is not God looking down the corridors of time to see who will believe

- Then His deciding to choose those people would be based on their actions

³ Hendriksen, 360.

⁴ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 9-16*, 98.

That is a wrong view of God

- That would make God's actions contingent upon man's actions

The base word for foreknowledge is actually the word for knowledge

- Frequently in the Bible, to know someone was to have an intimate relationship with that person

In Amos 3:2 God says, “**You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth**”

- God had a special relationship with the nation Israel⁵

1 Peter 1:20 speaks of Christ Himself as being “**foreknown before the foundation of the world**”

- God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have had an eternal, intimate relationship with one another
- In John 17, they are said to be “**one**” in essence

Ephesians 1:4 tells us, “**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**”

- God's eternal choice of us

Christ has had an intimate relationship with God the Father

- So we, as God's people, enjoy an intimate relationship with God

Paul's argument is that it is impossible for God to reject those with whom He has had a relationship!

- This would invalidate His divine promises
- This would nullify His divine faithfulness
- This would discredit His divine integrity
- This would compromise His divine love⁶

As Christians, we don't have to wonder whether God loves us

- Our assurance and confidence is in God Himself
- In His faithfulness

What kind of assurance would it be for God to reject His own people?

- We couldn't trust God's Word
- We would always be doubting Him

The encouragement that Paul provides is that human sinfulness and disobedience could never cancel His promised Word⁷

- Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ!

Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

To show that God has always been faithful to His own people, Paul turns to the Old Testament once again

- He doesn't rely merely on his own experience
- Scripture, not experience or emotions, is authoritative and trustworthy

The specific passage that Paul quotes is from 1 Kings 19

- I had Jacob read part of this chapter earlier

⁵ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 410.

⁶ MacArthur, 100.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 674.

But we really need to back up a bit more

- 1 Kings 18 records the encounter between Elijah and King Ahab

Ahab was a wicked king

- His wife, Jezebel, was wicked as well
- Her very name is synonymous with a sinful woman

Jezebel brought in the worship of Baal to Israel

- Idolatry was a terrible sin in the eyes of the LORD

Finally, a showdown occurred on Mt. Carmel

- Elijah represented the true Israel, following the LORD
- Ahab represented apostate Israel, following Baal and Asherah

The numbers were staggering

- 1 vs 850

But that isn't exactly right

- Because when you are on the side of God, there's always a majority
- **"If God is for us, who is against us?"** (Rom 8:31)

Long story short – and it's a wonderful account – the false prophets couldn't bring down fire from heaven

- Elijah prays to God and He responds with fire

What a victory, right?

- Yes, but...

Ahab went back to his wife and told her what had happened

- She sent word to Elijah, saying, **"So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time"** (1 Kings 19:2)

God just showed Elijah that even 850 to 1 was no match

- Yet when hearing about one woman, Jezebel, how did Elijah respond?

"And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers'" (19:3-4)

- Fear
- Discouragement
- Despair

God approaches Elijah and asks him, **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"** (19:9)

- He responds, **"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away"** (19:10)

Elijah thinks that he is the only faithful prophet in Israel

- Perhaps he thinks that he is the only faithful follower of the Lord in Israel
- If he is killed, then there won't be anyone who believes in the Lord!

This is the verse that Paul quotes in Romans 11:3

3 “Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.”

Perhaps Paul found a bit in common with Elijah

- They were both spokesmen for the Lord
- They were both living in a day when it appeared that very few Jews were truly following the Lord

Elijah’s zeal was certainly right

- He was concerned that God’s prophets were killed
- He was concerned that God’s altars had been torn down

But where Elijah failed was in his estimation of the faithful remnant

- He thought he was the only one

I have heard this attitude referred to as “Elijah syndrome”

- The false belief that we are the only faithful ones
- This type of attitude can quickly degenerate into pride and self-pity

But let’s notice how God responds to him

- Look at Romans 11:4

4 But what is the divine response to him? “I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.”

What a stark contrast between Elijah’s complaint and the Divine response!

- Elijah – “I am the only faithful one left!”
- The Lord – “I have kept for Myself 7000 men who have been faithful”

How humbling this must have been for Elijah to hear

- How confusing this must have been as well

Perhaps Elijah wondered, “If there are 7000 men who haven’t bowed the knee to Baal, then *where are they?*”

- But Elijah didn’t need to know who or where they were
- Elijah simply needed to be reminded that God had His remnant in Israel at that time

During the days of Elijah, Israel was involved with gross idolatry

- Rampant, flagrant worship of Baal and Asherah

But God had preserved 7000 men – males – who had “**not bowed the knee to Baal**”

- To bow the knee is a sign of reverence, respect, worship, and submission

I think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego

- In the midst of threats to their lives, they remained firm
- They didn’t budge, bow, bend, or burn

Notice the emphasis that Paul highlights, “I have kept for Myself” (emphasis mine)

- Having a remnant of God’s people wasn’t primarily for the benefit of the Jews
- Having a remnant of God’s people was primarily for the sake, the glory, and the reputation of God Himself

For God not to have a remnant was to undermine His faithfulness to His people

- His own glory was on the line!

During the time of Elijah, the nation of Israel, as a whole, was unbelieving

- Yet God would not destroy the nation because of the believing remnant

5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.

As it was in the days of Elijah, so it was in the days of Paul

- And, might I add, the same is true in our day and age

There is always “a remnant according to God’s gracious choice”

- God always has His people

This remnant does not come about by works

- Neither by human descent
- Neither by morality

The remnant is sustained exclusively by God’s “gracious choice”

- Grace, as we know, is receiving something we don’t deserve

No one among us deserves God’s favor

- We have all sinned
- We have all fallen short of God’s glory

God’s election is never based on who we are or what we have done

- God’s election is always based on His own choice of grace

The remnant is seen throughout the Bible

- Many perish, but few survive
 - o Noah
 - o Lot
 - o Elijah

Even before the Messiah arrived on the Earth, there was a remnant anticipating His appearing

- Zacharias and Elizabeth
- Simeon, Anna, and the shepherds

6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

A closing remark is given about the difference between works and grace

- These two are completely opposite of one another

If the remnant was on the basis of works, “**grace is no longer grace**”

- Our works cannot save us or merit favor with God

“**who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**” (2 Tim 1:9)

Consider

- **The conversion of Paul**
- **The remnant of grace**

III. **The condition of Israel (11:7-10)**

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

Following on the heels of verse 6 which contrasted grace and works is another contrast here in verse 7

- “**that which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained**”
- “**but those who were chosen obtained it**”

What is Paul talking about?

- What didn't Israel obtain?
- What did “**those who were chosen**” obtain?

Throughout the book of Romans, the theme has been righteousness

- How a sinner can have a righteous standing with God

The answer is that a sinner can only have a righteous standing with God on the basis of faith alone

- Not through any other means

Romans 11:7 reminds us of what we saw in 9:30-31, “**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.**”

- Israel, as a whole, had sought to have a righteous standing with God on the basis of works

Contrasting with Israel as a whole is “**those who were chosen**”

- Again, the emphasis on Divine initiative is listed here

How do we know that God has not rejected His people?

- Because God is still saving His remnant from among the Jews!

What happens to those who were not chosen?

- The text is clear, “**the rest were hardened**”

The word here for “**hardened**” means “to cover with a thick skin, to harden by covering with a callous”⁸

- It implies becoming spiritually insensitive

⁸ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 372.

If you look at Scripture, Divine hardening is never separate from mankind hardening his own heart⁹

- Pharaoh
- Judas Iscariot

The Jews had grown so calloused in their hearts that when Jesus Christ came to the Earth, they crucified Him!

They didn't harden themselves

- Rather, they “**were hardened**”
- The obvious Subject is God Himself

Is this fair?

- This goes back to Romans 9:19-21, “**You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?’**”

God hardens those who refuse to believe

- Unbelief brings about spiritual blindness, insensitivity, and bondage¹⁰

The tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility is great

- But we dare not cast accusations at God
- He is the Potter, we are the clay

Let's say that I am building a campfire¹¹.

- And as I put wood onto the fire, a flame burns my hand

Whose fault is this?

- The fire – for being so hot and uncontrollable
- Myself – for not being more careful and cautious
- God – for not preventing this from happening

Dear friend, don't think that rejecting the Gospel over and over again will not bring about consequences

- You can't blame God
- You can only blame yourself

8 just 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.”

Romans 11:8-10 contain three OT quotations

- Deuteronomy 29:4
- Isaiah 29:10
- Psalm 69:22-23

⁹ MacArthur, 103.

¹⁰ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 189.

¹¹ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 291.

What is significant is that Paul quotes from the three main divisions of the Hebrew canon¹²

- The Law (Deuteronomy)
- The Prophets (Isaiah)
- The Writings (Psalm)

Here in verse 8, Paul combines two OT references

- Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people that they had seen the works of God with their eyes¹³

- God had rescued them in a mighty way out of Egypt

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet reminds the people that they had heard the words of God with their ears

- The voice of God had been clearly understood through His spokesmen

But because the bulk of Israel shut their eyes and ears, God would dull their senses

- They would experience a spiritual insensitivity to the things of God
- This was part of the Divine, judicial punishment for rejecting God and His Word

“A drunkard may claim that he is not responsible for what he does. But he is accountable for getting into that state.”¹⁴

9 And David says, “LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.”

Paul continues to build evidence by citing OT references

- Romans 11:9-10 quote Psalm 69:22-23

Psalm 69 is quoted in five different NT contexts

- Most of the contexts are Messianic in nature

David writes of a “**table**”

- The table is a place of food, sustenance, and fellowship
- It is a place of safety and security

When you have friends over to your home, you may invite them to your table

- You share a meal
- You enjoy a time of fellowship

The Jews looked upon God’s Word – specifically the Torah – to be their spiritual sustenance

- But because of their unbelief, the Word became a source of judgment!¹⁵

But what a shock that many Jews were coming to God’s table, but it was “**a snare and a trap**”

- What was designed to be a place of fellowship was actually a trap!

¹² Moo, 681.

¹³ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Romans*, 118.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 403.

¹⁵ MacArthur, 104.

Paul is emphasizing yet again how many of the Jews were coming to the Scriptures, expecting comfort, assurance, and encouragement

- Yet they were not submitting themselves to the Scriptures

Many of these Jews thought that they were righteous in God's eyes

- Yet they were not

They were trying to be righteous through works

- Instead of by faith

Paul includes the thoughts of “**stumbling block**” and “**retribution**”

- This is the penalty for their error

How tragic it is that so many people put their trust in the very thing that damns them spiritually!

10 “LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.”

In Romans 11:10, Paul continues to quote Psalm 69, this time verse 23

- Again, the apostle makes reference to the “**eyes**” of the Jews being “**darkened**” and their “**backs**” being bent forever

These aren't pleasant consequences

- They are designed to be a warning to the Jews for rejecting the Gospel message

In John 12:37-40, we read, “**But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?’ For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES, AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART; LEST THEY SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED, AND I HEAL THEM’**” (emphasis mine)

- Notice that they were not able to believe

As Alva J. McClain writes in his commentary on Romans, “**If a man says, ‘I will not,’ there may come a time when he will say, ‘I cannot.’**”¹⁶

While I attended seminary, I worked with the blind and visually impaired

- My job was to setup computers and other equipment for them

I had some customers who suffered from macular degeneration

- This is a condition where individuals have loss of vision, specifically in the center of their vision field
- Many times, their peripheral vision is still ok

Many of these people, earlier in their lives, had great vision

- But that was not the case

I think that Paul would diagnose the nation Israel as having spiritual macular degeneration

- They have lost the center of their vision field – their central focus
- But they don't seem to notice the difference

¹⁶ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, 198.

Whether you are a Jew or Gentile here this morning, your greatest need is to humble yourself under the Lord Jesus Christ

- Ask Him for forgiveness
- Ask Him to change your life
- Ask Him to take control of your life