

What About God's Plans and Program for the Jewish People?

Romans 11:1-10

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Background Notes

In Romans chapters 9-11 the apostle Paul answered the most obvious and logical question that would be raised in the minds of the readers of chapters 1 through 8 – the question that would come to the minds of readers in the first century as well as readers today. The obvious question is: "What about the Jewish people? What about God's plan and program and promises for the Jewish people, the promises made to them in the Old Testament?"

In the good news of Romans 1-8 we learned that anyone can become part of God's family. The Lord Jesus died for the sins of the world so that **anyone** who comes to God by faith in Christ can be saved. **Everyone** who is saved is incorporated into the church (the Body of Christ), including both Jews and Gentiles. However, it was primarily Gentiles who were coming to faith in Jesus Christ (both then and now).

Does that mean that the Jews are no longer God's chosen people? Does it mean that God has changed His plans concerning the nation of Israel? Does it mean that God has withdrawn His promises to the Jewish people as a nation? Well, in Romans 9-11, the apostle Paul answered the readers' questions about Israel. The answer is that **God has not changed His plans for the nation of Israel**, and **God has not withdrawn His promises to the Jewish people** as a nation! Even though the church has been formed and is composed primarily of Gentiles, the church includes Jews who are believers in Jesus Christ as Messiah.

However, the fact that there are Jewish believers in the church today is not the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews as a nation. God has brought in and is forming a church that is primarily composed of Gentiles, but He has not done away with His plans and programs for the nation of Israel. You might say that God has two programs going on at the same time: one for the church and one for Israel. Israel as a nation has been **temporarily** set aside while God is focusing primarily at the present time on the church, which is the Body and Bride of Christ. But God will again focus on Israel as a nation in the future! This is made very clear in the chapter before us.

In the first section of Romans 11, Paul's main point is that there has always been a believing remnant of Jewish people – even when most of the nation was unfaithful, and even now while Israel has been set aside **temporarily** from its place of privilege.

Doctrinal Points

1. There has always been a remnant of Jewish believers.

Verse 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 question in verse 1 expects a negative answer – that's the way it's written in Greek. The words, "has God cast away His people?" could be paraphrased as, "God hasn't cast away His people, has He?" The question expects a negative answer, and the answer here is an emphatic "No, certainly not!" God has not cast away His people, and Paul gave two illustrations to prove his point that there has always been a "remnant" of Jewish believers.

Illustration #1 is the apostle Paul himself. Verse 1: *"...For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."* Paul was not only of the seed of Abraham, he was of the tribe of Benjamin -- the tribe that gave Israel its first king. The tribe of Benjamin was part of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and people from that tribe and kingdom returned from Babylon without being assimilated in any way by the Gentiles. If ever there was a "true blue Jew," it was the apostle Paul! And God had chosen him, of all people, to become a believer in Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior! So certainly the apostle Paul was proof that God still had a remnant of Jewish believers, even though most of the nation of Israel had been set aside.

Illustration #2 is the 7000 believers of Elijah's day. Verses 2-4: *"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, saying, ³ 'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' 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.'"*

Do you remember the story of Elijah from I Kings 17-19? After Elijah's great victory over the prophets of the pagan god Baal at Mount Carmel, he ran for his life when wicked queen Jezebel threatened him. (He ran all the way down to Mount Sinai, a distance of about three hundred miles. He was taking no chances; he wanted to put all kinds of distance between him and Jezebel!) When Elijah arrived at Mt Sinai God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah responded,

"I'm the only believer left in the northern kingdom of Israel, and they're seeking my life!" Well, the Lord had to correct Elijah at this point by telling him, "No Elijah, you're not the only believer left in the northern kingdom of Israel -- *'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'*" These 7000 secret believers certainly should have been a little more public with their testimonies of faith in God, but they were true believers! Paul's point here is that even in the northern kingdom of Israel, that had turned to the worship of Baal during the reigns of its evil kings, even there God still had a believing remnant of Jewish believers. Now look at verse 5: "*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*" There is **always** been a remnant of Jewish believers.

2. There has always been "the rest" of the Jews, unbelievers.

Verse 7: "*What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*" If there has always been a remnant of Jewish believers, then it stands to reason that unbelief has always characterized the rest of the Jewish people. The Jews of the believing remnant are "elect" according to God's grace. The rest of the Jewish people are unbelievers, and are not part of the elect company. In fact, verse 7 says that unbelieving Israel is **blinded**.

We have already seen in our studies of Romans 9 and 10 that people of Israel were blinded because they would not humbly submit to God and come to Him by faith. Look at Romans 9:31-32: "*but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.*" And Romans 10:3-4, "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" And Romans 10:21, "*All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.*" So it is clear that the people of Israel were blinded because they wouldn't submit to God and come to Him by faith.

In verses 8-11 of Romans 11 Paul quoted some Old Testament prophetic Scriptures from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the book of Psalms to show that Israel's blindness was predicted, and that it came about because of unbelief. Verses 8-9: "*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."*

We know from the context of these Old Testament Scriptures that God hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes because of their unbelief. So the blame for Israel's blindness can't be pinned on God! Even though the Jewish unbelievers were not elect, they were responsible to believe. Their blindness and hardness of heart was their own fault. Another way we can put it: God will blind the eyes of those who will not see – those who refuse to see. God will harden the hearts of those who will not believe. So in reference to Israel then, there has always been a remnant of Jewish believers, and there has always been "the rest" of the Jews, who are unbelievers.

Practical Application

Let's not change the definition of God's grace!

Verse 6: *"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."* What's the definition of God's grace? I think that most of you know the acrostic: G-R-A-C-E is "God's Riches At Christ's Expense."

Grace is God's **unmerited** favor towards man. Note: **unmerited!** Our salvation was purchased at **Christ's expense** -- **not by anything** we have done or could ever do! Once "human works" in any form are included, it's no longer grace – whether it's human works in the form of human goodness, in the form of noble human character, or in the ability to choose God. Once you allow any kind of human works, you have infringed on God's grace. You've changed the definition of grace. Worse yet, you've infringed on the character of God, because you lower the character of God and the work of Christ if you add even a little bit of human effort to His grace!

As verse 6 says, *"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."* This is so straightforward and simple to follow! Why do some folks have a problem seeing this?

Do you have a problem with God's grace? Let's not change the definition of God's grace!