

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

July 12, 2023

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

The Dispensational Section (Chapters 9 – 11)

Text – Romans 11 – *God's Dealings with Israel in the Future*

Introduction

This chapter will tell us what God plans to do with Israel, and it helps us to understand the situation a little bit better from God's perspective. These three dispensational chapters (9 – 11) have all given us a better, though limited, view of God's perspective from Heaven, and the view is only limited because of our finite ability to understand spiritual truths.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33)

God is not through with Israel. He is working in our present day (since the time of Paul) to save them individually, and someday, He will open their eyes, corporately as a nation, so that they will see the Resurrected Christ.

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (Zechariah 12:10)

I. The Believing Remnant (vs. 1 – 6)

In introducing this subject, Paul will remind his readers that any individual Israelite can be saved if he will simply trust the Lord Jesus Christ. He is stating that God hasn't forsaken Israel, even in this present time, because anybody from Israel could at any time become born-again through faith in Jesus Christ, just as many other Jews and Gentiles had already done.

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." (Romans 11:1)

Paul was a Jew, through and through. Paul was a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;" (Philippians 3:5)

Paul was an Israelite, yet Paul did not consider himself cast away. Paul was willing to break ties with his people, and even his family, because of his faith in Christ, and this was something that most Jews were unwilling to do:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 10:34-39)

Jesus demands that we trust Him even if we must stand alone. Individual Jews would come to Christ if the corporate body believed in Him, but Jesus didn't want their faith to be based upon what everybody else was doing. He wanted them to "come out" from among the nation and trust Him. Paul had done that, and so had many other from his nation.

"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying," (Romans 11:2)

Paul will now use the illustration of Elijah. In 1 Kings 18 – 19, when he was fighting against King Ahab and the prophets of Baal, and running from Jezebel, he was overcome with discouragement. He thought he was the only true and faithful Israelite left, but God showed him that even in this time of great apostasy there were 7000 out there that had not bowed their knee to Baal. Elijah thought that God had forsaken His people. It seemed that Israel as a nation was through, but God reserved a believing remnant.

Paul is quoting from 1 Kings 19:14 & 18 in the following verses:

"Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." (Romans 11:3 - 4)

Note – these do not appear to be exact quotes. Compare them with the text found in our King James Bible:

"And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the

*sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:10 &14
– identical verses)*

*"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal,
and every mouth which hath not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18)*

Paul is not being careless when handling the Word of God. Remember, he was translating the portions of the passage that were important to his argument, and he was translating them into Greek for the Saints at Rome. We now are reading a translation into English of what Paul wrote in Greek. The passage from 1 Kings 19 that we read above was translated directly from the Hebrew into our English Bible.

The argument loses nothing in the translation. Both Paul and Elijah have captured the truth that even though many have turned completely away from Him, there were still some, 7000 to be precise, who had not. There was a believing remnant at a time when Israel, nationally, especially the northern kingdom, was completely apostate.

***"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."
(Romans 11:5)***

Now Paul makes the application to the present day. Though, as a nation, Israel had rejected their Messiah, there was still a believing remnant, and Paul was one of them.

Notice the phrase “election of grace” – very interesting. The word “election” means the act of picking out or choosing. If we read it just as it is worded, it could mean according to the act of choosing grace, meaning that the ones who choose grace are the ones “electing” in this case. Those that believe, those that have placed their faith in Christ have chosen grace, meaning they have believed the gospel of grace. However, it could also be understood that the personification of “grace” is the one that is electing or choosing. In that case then it would be God that has chosen. Either way, the meaning remains the same; this remnant is elect because they have believed.

"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6)

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Notice this statement by Dr. McGee:

In other words, grace and works represent two mutually exclusive systems. They are diametrically opposed to each other. The remnant at this time is composed of those who are not saved by works or by merit; they are saved by the grace of God. The future purpose of God—from the day Paul wrote down to the present—concerns those who will accept Christ.¹

Good works are a product of grace, however:

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20)

II. The Blinded Remainder (vs. 7 – 10)

Now Paul will discuss those that are Israelites but are not believers; they were not part of the believing remnant.

"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7)

The wording here is very interesting: Israel is referred to as "he", meaning that Paul is speaking here of the entire nation as one corporate body. He is not speaking of individual Israelites at first. Israel didn't find Christ as a nation. Why?

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" (John 1:10-12)

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:18-19)

Jesus was despised and rejected by his own people; He was the stone that the builders rejected. Israel rejected their Saviour.

"but the election hath obtained it". Why? Because they believed. The nation rejected Christ, but there was a remnant that believed.

¹ McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)* (electronic ed., Vol. 43, p. 51). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"and the rest were blinded." Question – When were they blinded. The extreme Calvinist would say that they were blinded by God before the foundations of the earth but is that what it says here. The election obtained salvation through faith, and those that were blinded, were blinded because of their unbelief.

They closed their eyes to the gospel:

"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

(Matthew 13:15)

They also closed their ears:

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord," (Acts 7:57)

Satan also blinds:

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Why do we always assume right away that God arbitrarily blinds people, without them first rejecting His word. Just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened by God only after he had hardened it himself, and only after God knew (through His foreknowledge) that Pharaoh would reject the word of God and wouldn't let the people of Israel go. (Exodus 3:19; 5:2)

"(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day." (Romans 11:8)

Here Paul refers to two Old Testament verses:

"For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered." (Isaiah 29:10)

"Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." (Deuteronomy 29:4)

"And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway." (Romans 11:9 - 10)

Verses 9 – 10 were taken from Psalm 69:

"Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake." (Psalms 69:22-23)

Notice what Wiersbe states regarding these verses:

This psalm is one of the most important of the messianic psalms and is referred to several times in the New Testament. Note especially Romans 11:4, 9, 21–22. Their “table to become a snare” means that their blessings turn into burdens and judgments. This is what happened to Israel: their spiritual blessings should have led them to Christ, but instead they became a snare that kept them from Christ. Their very religious practices and observances became substitutes for the real experience of salvation. Sad to say, this same mistake is made today when people depend on religious rituals and practices instead of trusting in the Christ who is pictured in these activities.²

Israel is temporarily blind as a nation, but make no mistake about it, there are a lot of individual Jews coming to the Lord today. We had a man at our church that we found at the rescue mission in Atlantic City, a homeless man. He came to our church solely because we took the people from the mission out to lunch after the service, before bringing them back to the mission. That man heard the gospel preached, and eventually trusted Christ as His Saviour. That man was a Jew, but he was gloriously saved. The synagogue that he was a member of didn't want to hear about Jesus, but he did. By the way, that man died of a heart attack at the very young age of 47, but he went to Heaven. I thank God that He is still in the business of saving Jews. “Whosoever will” applies to Israelites just as it refers to Gentiles.

III. The “Branch” Reasoning (vs. 11 – 24)

Paul will now explain his reasoning behind Israel's blinding (in part v. 25)

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." (Romans 11:11)

It seems that God is allowing them to stumble today, but their stumbling has opened the door of opportunity for the Gentiles to receive and believe the gospel, which ultimately will provoke Israel to jealousy.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 551). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Romans 11:12)

Israel's fall has benefitted the rest of the world in that God has now opened wide His arms to the Gentiles. Paul's argument is that if their fall worked good to the Gentiles, their fullness will bless the rest of the world even more.

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:" (Romans 11:13)

Paul was proud (in a good way) of the fact that he was called of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

"If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them." (Romans 11:14)

Wiersbe states:

In Romans 2:1–3 Paul used the Gentiles to prove the Jews guilty of sin, but here he used the Gentiles to assure Israel of a future restoration. His logic here is beautiful. When the Jews rejected the Gospel, God sent it to the Gentiles, and they believed and were saved. Three tragedies occurred in Israel: the nation *fell* (Rom. 11:11), was *lost* (Rom. 11:12, "diminished"), and was *cast away* (Rom. 11:15). None of these words suggests a *final* judgment on Israel. But the amazing thing is that through Israel's fall, salvation came to the Gentiles. God promised that the Gentiles would be saved (Rom. 9:25–26) and He kept His promise. Will He not also keep His promise to the Jews?

It is important to understand that the Old Testament promises to the Gentiles were linked to Israel's "rise"—her entering into her kingdom. Prophecies like Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 60 make it clear that the Gentiles will share in Israel's kingdom. But Israel did not "rise"; *she fell!* What would God then do with the Gentiles? God introduced a new factor—the church—in which believing Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22). In Ephesians 3, Paul called this new program "the mystery," meaning "the sacred secret" that was not revealed in the Old Testament. Does this mean that God has abandoned His kingdom program for Israel? Of course not! Israel is merely set aside until the time comes for God's plans for Israel to be fulfilled.

Paul stated that the Gentiles had a vital ministry to Israel. Today, the saved Gentiles provoke Israel "to jealousy" (see Rom. 10:19) because of the spiritual riches they have in Christ. Israel today is spiritually bankrupt, while Christians have "all spiritual blessings"

in Christ (Eph. 1:3). (If an unsaved Jew visited the average church service, would he be provoked *to jealousy* and wish he had what we have—or would he just be provoked?)³

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15)

Paul keeps pointing to the fact that Israel will be reconciled with God. He alluded to it back in v. 12.

"For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches." (Romans 11:16)

The first part of this verse has to do with a lump of dough. (See Numbers 15:17 – 21; Leviticus 23:9 – 14) The first part of the dough was offered up to God, which was a recognition that the entire lump belonged to Him, and if the lump was holy, the first fruit would be holy also.

The second part of the verse, along with vs. 17 – 21 have to do with the olive tree. The olive tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 11:16 - 17; Hosea 14:4 – 6)

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;" (Romans 11:17)

The branches here are the “natural branches” of v. 21, and they refer to the Jews. The wild olive tree that was “grafted in among them” are the Gentiles. Notice that some of the original tree and branches are still there.

"Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." (Romans 11:18)

There is no reason for the wild tree to boast “against” the branches (unbelieving Jews) that were broken off, because it is the root of the tree that those branches came from that is “bearing” providing the sustenance for the wild tree.

"Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." (Romans 11:19)

Pride would cause the Gentiles to think themselves superior to the Jews that were broken off. In other words, we might be tempted to think that we were better because God rejected them and received us.

³ Wiersbe, p. 551.

"Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:" (Romans 11:20)

The natural branches were broken off because of unbelief. This ought to cause us to fear, not boast.

"For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." (Romans 11:21)

Here Paul is referring to the Gentiles as a corporate body. He is not saying that an individual Gentile believer could lose his salvation because of unbelief. The Gentiles were in a place of spiritual blessing because of Israel's unbelief, which caused the gospel to spread to them, but when the "fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (v. 25), God will again turn his attention back on Israel. Just as Israel as a nation rejected Christ, the Gentiles are also corporately rejecting Him as well.

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."
(Romans 11:22)

Again, the reference here is to Israel corporately, and the Gentiles corporately.

IV. The Beautiful Restoration of Israel (vs. 23 – 33)

"And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11:23)

Israel as a nation will be reconciled back to God, but that will only happen when they believe.

"For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Romans 11:24)

If God could take a people who were completely foreign to God and bring them into a relationship with Him, then God can certainly bring His own people back to Himself.

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)

Here again we see the responsibility of man reconciled with the sovereignty of God. Partially, Israel was blind because of their own unbelief, but God used their unbelief and subsequent

blindness to open the door to the Gentiles. Thus, God accomplishes His purpose of saving some from all groups of people.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26)

The reference here is to 59:20 – 21:

"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever." (Isaiah 59:20-21)

Here we see the answer to Paul's original question in v. 1. No, God has not cast away His people. He's going to save them. (See Zechariah 12 – 13) This, of course, does not mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but it does mean that the nation of Israel will someday see that they need a Saviour, and will turn to Christ.

"For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." (Romans 11:27)

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

"As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." (Romans 11:28)

The Jews today may be bitter enemies of the gospel, but don't mess with them, because they are still God's People, and God isn't through with them yet.

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Romans 11:29)

God knew what He was doing when He called out Israel to be a people unto Himself, and He has not changed His mind about them. He knew the beginning from the end.

On a practical note, this verse was very precious to me long after God had originally called me to serve Him full-time. I had delayed my obedience to His will for a long time, and erroneously thought that God no longer could use me. I was miserably living outside of what I knew was

God's will for my life, and then I came across this verse in my daily devotions. I might have been taking it out of the original context of Israel, but it was a tremendous blessing to me to realize that God still wanted to use me in His service.

"For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." (Romans 11:30 - 31)

God used Israel to be a source of great blessing to the Gentiles of the early church, and God will use the Gentile church someday to be a great source of blessing to Israel.

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Romans 11:32)

The "all" – means both Israel and the Gentiles.

Concluding Verses to the Dispensational Section of Romans

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)

Dr. McGee gives this illustration regarding these concluding verses:

Once, while driving back from Texas to California, my little girl developed a fever of 104 degrees. I took her to a hospital in Phoenix, Arizona. She did not understand why I had taken her to the hospital, especially when the doctor probed around and actually made her cry. She said, "Daddy, why did you bring me here?" She did not understand that, since she was sick, I was doing the wisest thing I could do under the circumstances and that I was doing it because I loved her. Oh, my friend, God is doing what is best for us. We may not understand the things that happen to us, but we must believe that it is for our good that God allows them. We are like little children, and we cannot understand God's ways. Our circumstances may not always seem to be good, but they come from the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." God says to us, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways,

and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9). Oh, how we need to recognize this fact.⁴

These concluding verses of chapter 9 – 11 I think really sum up well and put an end to all the theological debates that Christians have regarding the discussions of God’s sovereignty. The bottom line is that we are just not smart enough to comprehend God. His ways are “past finding out”. That means there are always going to be a lot of unanswered questions. But there are also so many principles and instructions in the Bible that are crystal clear. Someone once asked a man if he was troubled about the parts of the Bible that he didn’t understand. His answer was interesting. He said he was more troubled about the parts of the Bible that he clearly understood, because those were the parts that he knew he was responsible to obey. Let’s stop arguing about stuff that is “past finding out” and let’s work together to do what God has commissioned us to do.

Wiersbe says:

Having contemplated God’s great plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles, all Paul could do was sing a hymn of praise. As someone has remarked, “Theology becomes doxology!” Only a God as wise as our God could take the fall of Israel and turn it into salvation for the world! His plans will not be aborted, nor will His purposes lack fulfillment. No human being can fully know the mind of the Lord; and the more we study His ways, the more we offer Him praise. Are we to conclude that God does *not* know what He is doing, and that the nation of Israel completely ruined His plans? Of course not! God is too wise to make plans that will not be fulfilled. Israel did not allow Him to rule, so He overruled!⁵

⁴ McGee, pp. 63–64.

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 553.