

ROMANS 9-11

ROMANS 11:1-36 | WEEK 3: FEB 21, 2016

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS 11

Has Israel's disobedience and unbelief resulted in God's rejection of His people?

Chapter 11 builds upon the arguments of chapters 9 and 10, to remind us that despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God is faithful to his promises. It is also a warning to the Gentile Christians in Rome to not be proud and arrogant, reminding them that their election is purely by God's grace and not by any status, merit, work, or privilege on their part.

PAUL, ELIJAH, AND THE REMNANT

In order to show that God has not rejected Israel, Paul first offers himself as an example of a faithful Israelite (11:1). He then quotes 1 Kings 19:10-18: the prophet Elijah was also confronted with the wholesale disobedience of Israel, but God told him. "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (11:4). Paul sees himself and the other first-century Jewish Christians as a similar faithful remnant, chosen entirely by God's grace (11:6-7). This also reminds us, in chapter 9:6-8, of Paul's statement that "not all Israel is Israel" (9:6). The disobedient are hardened, as Deuteronomy 29, Isaiah 29, and Psalm 69 make clear (11:8-10).

HOLY LUMPS & BRANCHES OF THE OLIVE TREE

The issue of Jew-Gentile relationships is not just a personal issue for Paul; it is very likely that he is addressing a situation in the Roman church. We know that the Jews were expelled from Rome for a brief time. In Acts 18:2, Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth; they are there "because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome". At the time Paul is writing the letter to the Romans, Priscilla and Aquila are back in Rome (Romans 16:3-5). It is likely that this has caused strain in Jew-Gentile relations within the church itself. Paul spends so much time on this question because he is addressing a very real need in the congregation he is writing to.

Paul uses two illustrations to show that Israel has not been rejected. The first is derived from the offering of firstfruits in the temple (Leviticus 23:9-15). The acceptance of the firstfruits makes the whole "batch" or "lump" acceptable. The second is an olive tree, where the holy "root" makes the "branches" holy (Isaiah 11; John 15:5). God, having done the harder work of grafting wild olive branches into a cultivated olive tree, can re-graft branches that have been broken off. If Israel repents of its unbelief and turns to Christ in faith, it can be grafted back into the tree. The Gentiles are also warned that their place in the olive tree is purely by grace; God can remove them just as easily (11:20-22).

ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

Verses 25 through 32 present one of the most difficult passages in the entire Bible to interpret. The following is a brief attempt by addressing 3 basic questions: *How, When, & Who?*

1. **How** is 'all Israel' saved? By grace through faith in Christ. Paul here is not offering another way of salvation for Jews outside of Christ. The whole of Romans, not least 10:9, stands behind 11:25-32.
2. **When** is 'all Israel' saved? Some have taken the "And so" of 11:26 to mean "And then" that follows as a *future* event happening after the "full number of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25). This is unlikely for two reasons. First, the Greek word *houtos* in 11:26, is translated best as "so" or "in this way" rather than "then" because it is addressing the question of how, not when 'all Israel' is saved. Second, verses 30-31 imply that 'all Israel' receives mercy "now", rather than in the future.
3. **Who** is 'all Israel'? How does Paul define Israel? While he has been talking about Israel 'according to the flesh' for most of chapters 9-11 (9:8, 11:14), there are significant qualifiers. Besides the "Not all Israel is Israel" of 9:6, 9:8 states "it is not children according to the flesh who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." Does 'all Israel' include the Gentiles? Paul can refer to the Gentiles using language descriptive of Israel (Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 6:16, Philippians 3:3); is he doing something similar here in 11:26? And what does 'all' mean? Does it mean literally everyone of all time, everyone at one particular time, or is it a corporate representative of the whole?

At the end of the day, we should conclude with Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of Go!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

References:

Gorman, Michael J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004, pg. 385-389.

Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2*. Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, pg. 1-67.