



TEXT

The Remnant of Israel

11 I ask then, Did God reject his people?
By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ²God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"^a? ⁴And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal,"^b ⁵So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶And if by grace, then it is not longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.^c ⁷What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, ⁸as it is written:

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes so that they could not see
and ears so that they could not hear,
to this very day."^d

⁹And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for
them.

¹⁰May their eyes be darkened so they cannot
see,
and their backs be bent forever."^e

Ingrafted Branches

¹¹Again I ask, Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹²But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

¹³I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

After reading this passage, I feel...

☐ like joining Paul in praise. ☐ somewhat bewildered. ☐ like I've figured out predestination.

Second Reading/Big Idea

Paul's main concern in this passage is:

SEARCH

1. What is the question that has troubled Paul all along? (v. 1)

2. How do the examples he gives (vv. 1-5) answer that concern?

3. How is the question rephrased in verse 11?

4. In response, how does Paul account for Israel's resistance?

5. How does Paul see eventual hope coming from the transgression of Israel? (v. 12)

6. In what way was Paul's own ministry to the Gentiles helping the Jews? (vv. 13-14)

GROUP AGENDA

7. How does the principle in verse 16 apply to Paul's argument?

8. Who are the (a) branches that are broken off, (b) the other branches, (c) the wild olive, and (d) the olive tree itself? (vv. 17-24)

a.

b.

c.

d.

9. What is Paul's point in this illustration? (vv. 22-24)

10. What is the mystery that has been revealed? (vv. 25-26)

11. Ultimately, what is it that Paul wants both his Jewish and Gentile readers to see? (vv. 28-32)

APPLY

Prayer/psalm. The doxology (vv. 33-36) is one of the most beautiful songs in all the Bible. Meditate on this song, noting the qualities of God that it celebrates. Then, based on these qualities, write your own prayer (or song) of praise.

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What memorable experience of rejection do you recall from your teen years: getting cut from the team? turned down for a date? not being invited to the "big" party? How did you get over it? ☐ What is one time you were embarrassed by "stumbling" when you were trying to make a good impression on someone? ☐ What did you put down for READ? ☐ What is your favorite mystery movie or book?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ What is the remnant? Who was this in Elijah's day? Who in Paul's day? ☐ How does Paul see everything "working together for good" for the nation of Israel? ☐ How is the question about God's special people—the Jews—finally resolved? Hint: look for the word "mystery." ☐ Case History: Your friend believes strongly that our foreign policy should be supportive of Israel because the nation of Israel today is the same as the people of Israel in the Old Testament. What is your response?

TO CLOSE/20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you put down for APPLY? ☐ When someone else receives God's blessings in their lives, does that spur you on to seek God more, or does it make you upset? Why? ☐ Since Christianity is grafted onto Old Testament Judaism, what should be the Christian's attitude towards Jews? ☐ What song or hymn best expresses your sense of praise and wonder before God?

SCRIPTURE TEXT continued

am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

²²Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

All Israel Will Be Saved

²⁵I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has

come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
²⁷And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins!"

²⁸As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³²For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Doxology

³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and ^hknowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"ⁱ

³⁵"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"ⁱ

³⁶For from him and through him and to him
are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

^a31 Kings 19:10, 14 ^b41 Kings 19:18 ^c6 Some manuscripts by grace. But if by works, then it is no longer grace; if it were, work would no longer be work. ^d8 Deut. 29:4; Isaiah 29:10 ^e10 Psalms 69:22, 23 ^f27 Isaiah 59:20, 21; 27:9 ^g31 Some manuscripts do not have now. ^h33 Or riches and the wisdom and the ⁱ34 Isaiah 40:13
^l35 Job 41:11

NOTES ON ROMANS 11:1-36

Summary/Romans 11:1-36. The theme of chapter 11 is stated in verse 2a. "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew." Paul begins by pointing out that a remnant of Jewish believers already exists (vv. 1-10). Then, looking at the unbelieving majority, he asserts that their exclusion will not last forever (vv. 11-24). In verses 25-32 the mystery of God's divine plan for both Jew and Gentile is revealed. The chapter ends (vv. 33-36) with a hymn of wonder and praise.

v. 1a Paul asks yet another question, using the same form as in 10:18, 19; and in 11:11.

v. 1b **I am an Israelite** . . . Paul himself—a true Jew who is also a believing Christian—is proof that God has not cast off Israel and is still using Israel (through Paul) to fulfill its God-given task of bearing God's message to the world. In other words, God is still working through Israel, so He cannot have cast them off.

vv. 2-5 Even in Elijah's day those who remained faithful did so by God's grace (v. 4—"I reserved"). Because this remnant was of grace and not of works, its existence brings hope to the unfaithful majority that God has not abandoned Israel. So, too, in Paul's day, the small band of believing Jews is a guarantee of the continuing election of the whole of Israel.

v. 2a A strong, negative answer is given to the question in verse 1, as had previously been given in 3:3-4.

v. 2 **whom he foreknew** . . . "refers to the general election of the people as a whole, and indicates a further ground for denying that God has cast off his people. The fact that God foreknew them (i.e.,

deliberately joining them to himself in faithful love) excludes the possibility of his casting them off." (Cranfield)

v. 3 Paul quotes, probably from memory, the essence of 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

v. 4 **7000** . . . it has been suggested that not only is this the estimate of the number of those who remained faithful during a time of apostasy but also it is a number which served as a symbol of perfection or completeness (seven and multiples thereof have that significance in Judaism). So here God is declaring that He will bring to completion his plan of salvation for Israel.

v. 5 **remnant** . . . the prophets especially, saw that at no time was all of Israel faithful to God. On the other hand, there was always at least a small number who were true. They were like a nation within a nation. So when speaking of "the chosen people," one was really thinking of that minority.

v. 7 See parallel in 9:31 amplified here by the phrase "but the elect did" to take account of the conclusions of verses 1-6.

hardened . . . Greek word was used to describe a kidney stone or a callus and came to be used metaphorically—a heart hardens like stone into insensitivity. As Paul will soon show, this hardening is not God's last word.

v. 8 **spirit of stupor** . . . this phrase as used in Isaiah 29:10 describes a "state of spiritual insensitivity."

v. 9-10 When originally used in Psalm 69:22-23, these words were directed to those

people who persecuted Israel. Now with the Psalm understood in the light of the Messiah, Paul directs these words to unbelieving Israel.

v. 9 **their table . . . a snare** . . . however, this image must be understood—as a cloth spread for a meal entangling the feet as those eating spring up to ward off sudden danger, or as poisoned food which they are forced to eat—the root idea is that the very security of those feasting peacefully is the source of their ruin. So Israel resting peacefully in her calling as God's "chosen people" fails to note her own faithlessness and hardening, thinking herself beyond reproach.

v. 10 **their backs be bent** . . . metaphor for a slave.

v. 11-24 Though now there is only a remnant of believing Jews, the exclusion of the majority is not permanent. Their "stupor"—state of spiritual insensitivity—has made it possible for Gentiles to enter God's kingdom. This in turn will rouse the Jews to envy, and hence to a realization of what they are missing. In the meantime it is important for Gentile believers not to misread the situation and adopt a haughty, superior attitude towards unbelieving Jews.

v. 16 **first fruit** . . . an Old Testament image (Numbers 15:17-21). The first grains harvested were ground, baked, and then presented as an offering to God. Thereafter the rest of the grain would be counted as holy or sacred.

root/branches . . . a second picture follows from the first. In like fashion the

root, i.e., the patriarchs, was sacred to God. So, too, was the nation holy (or set apart to God).

vv. 17-24 Paul now develops, almost in allegorical fashion, another metaphor: the grafting of an olive tree. Israel is clearly the olive tree—a commonly used image (Jeremiah 11:16). But when it comes to the actual grafting process, what Paul describes is contrary to ordinary practice. Farmers graft cultivated tree branches onto wild trees and not the reverse as Paul suggests (though there is some evidence that occasionally wild olives were grafted onto unproductive domestic trees to invigorate them). In any case Paul is not teaching horticulture, and the point of his metaphor is quite clear. Still, it seems Paul was aware that what he was suggesting was contrary to nature (v. 24). In fact, this is his point: the inclusion of the Gentiles is not *natural*; it is by grace.

v. 17 **branches . . . broken off** . . . "to admit air and light to the graft as well as to prevent the vitality of the tree from being too widely diffused" (Ramsey). In terms of the metaphor, Paul is referring here to unbelieving Israel.

a wild olive . . . the Gentile Christians.

among the others . . . the remaining branches, i.e., the Jewish Christians.

v. 18 A strong warning to Gentile Christians not to despise the Jews.

v. 20 Faith, not personal merit, is the decisive factor, and so all grounds for boasting is cut away.

v. 21 "If God has not spared the unbelieving Jews, natural branches of the olive tree though they were, He will not spare the Gentile Christians, the alien branches which have been grafted in, if they fall from faith." (Cranfield)

v. 23 God has the power to graft Israel back into the olive tree. Christians ought to wait in expectation for this miracle.

vv. 25-32 Paul comes to the climax of chapters 9-11 in which he sets out the three steps of God's plan of salvation: (1) the unbelief of most of Israel making way for (2) the coming into the kingdom by the Gentiles, and then, finally (3) the termination of Israel's "hardening" and the subsequent salvation of "all Israel." Once stated (vv. 25-26a), Paul presents scriptural confirmation of this plan (vv. 26b-27) and ends (vv. 28-32) by drawing out the implications of what he has said in verses 25-27.

v. 25 **mystery** . . . in contrast to the contemporary use of this word and its emphasis on secrecy and hiddenness, in the New Testament a mystery is something which was hidden in the mind of God but which now He is pleased to reveal to all. It is something a person could never have figured out by oneself, but once disclosed it is to be proclaimed to all who will hear (i.e., not kept hidden).

hardening . . . the nature of the hardening is not clear. It was not just a matter of human disobedience (although that was involved) but it was of God. It was only *in part* (there was always a remnant). It was temporary—until the fullness of the

Gentiles came into the kingdom—and it was for the benefit of the Gentiles.

full number . . . the full number of the elect of the Gentiles.

vv. 26-27 A composite of Isaiah 59:20, 21; and 27:9. This quotation is understood by Paul to apply to the Messiah and is here a reference to his second coming when He will turn back godlessness from Israel and forgive their sins.

v. 26 **all Israel** . . . "The nation Israel as a whole, but not necessarily including every individual member" (Cranfield). Here Paul is affirming what he longs for—the salvation of the mass of Israel over against what he then knew: only a remnant of believers.

v. 28 Their election (the nation as a whole) is the permanent thing; their enmity is temporary.

v. 32 The climax of the argument: God treats all people in the same way. **Everyone** is disobedient but God shows mercy to all.

mercy on them all . . . "that is, upon all without distinction rather than all without exception" (Bruce). "All that Paul is actually saying is that no groups as such will ultimately be excluded. He is not saying that every member of those groups, any more than every person already within the Christian church, will in fact ultimately be saved." (J. A. T. Robinson)

v. 33-36 Paul concludes chapters 9-11 not in pessimism and despair but in a hymn of wonder and adoration at the wisdom and

mercy of God which is now clear as a result of the mystery of God's plan of salvation having been revealed.

- v. 33a The first of two exclamations found in the verse.

- v. 33 **depth** . . . i.e., how profound and immense.

riches . . . Paul is probably thinking of God's abundant mercy (vv. 31-32) but he may be referring to the infinite resources of God (2:9-10 and 9:23).

wisdom . . . that which guides God in both planning and effecting his purposes.

knowledge . . . probably Paul has in view God's elective love which is lavished on his people.

- v. 33b In the second exclamation, Paul focuses on the mysteriousness of God's ways. There is no way one could have guessed God's plan of mercy.

- v. 35 It is impossible to put God in one's debt.

- v. 36 Paul ends chapters 9-11 with the doxology. He has not provided neat answers to the complex issues he raises; but he has conveyed a sense of confidence that God is in control, that God will keep his promises, and that God wills mercy towards his people.