

## Has God Rejected His People, Israel?

(Romans 11:1-24)

**Story:** Frederick the Great was the King of Prussia from 1740-1786. During his tenure as King he would regularly discuss the Bible with his chaplain. On one such occasion, Frederick the Great asked his chaplain, “Can you prove to me in one sentence that the Bible is true?” After thinking about it for a few minutes the chaplain replied, “I don’t need an entire sentence. I only need two words to prove that the Bible is true and that God doesn’t lie. Those two words are ‘The Jews!’” What a perfect response! God has miraculously preserved the Jewish people for millennia despite hatred, opposition, persecution, and dispersion.

Have you ever questioned God’s love for you? Have you ever felt forsaken by God? I have two words for you: The Jews. As we consider the past and present rejection of Israel in Romans 9–11, we must ask such questions as: Has God’s love for Israel been quenched? Have His purposes for Israel been shelved? What about all the blessings promised to the nation that have not been fulfilled? An even more relevant question is: How can I, as a Gentile Christian trust the promises of God, when God was not able to fulfill His Word to Israel? Romans 11 tell us that Israel still has a great future in God’s plan. The reason is simple: God keeps His promises despite our failures.

**Intro:** In our last message in Romans 10:14-21, Paul showed that Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ resulted in the nations’ loss of her favored position as God’s elect, and the Gospel being sent out to and eagerly received by the Gentiles. This shocking turn of events **raises the logical question in 11:1, “I say then, God has not cast away His Jewish people, has He?” This is where we begin this morning.**

Open your Bibles if you will to Romans chapter 11. God as you know has made many marvelous promises to the nation of Israel. Promises of national blessing. Promises of spiritual leadership among the nations. And the Promise of a Savior, a Messiah. But the nation of Israel as a whole had rejected her Messiah. They rejected the only One in whom all of their promises could ever be fulfilled. In light of their rejection of their Messiah, what is going to happen to the nation of Israel? Is God going to cancel His promises to His people? Has God failed to keep His word to Abraham. Is God finished with the people of Israel? I mean, Paul already said that in light of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah, that God has turned to offer salvation to the Gentiles, a people who never pursued His righteousness (9:30 and 10:19-20). **This leads to Paul’s question here in chapter 11, verse 1,**

v. 1—“I say then, God has not cast away His Jewish people, has He?”

Paul responds to his rhetorical question in Romans 11, verse 1, with his characteristic **mh\ ge÷noito**, the very strong negative: “Absolutely not!” ; “By no means!” ; or “God forbid, let it never be!” Paul gives three reasons for his answer, which are developed in the remainder of this eleventh chapter. We will deal with the first two reasons why God is not finished with His people Israel this morning, and Lord willing, we will look at the third reason next Sunday morning as we conclude this section of the Book of Romans.

Reason one: there is a remnant according to God’s gracious choice (vv. 1-10);  
Reason number two: there is a reason for Israel’s unbelief; there are benefits derived from it (vv. 11-24); and  
Reason number three: there is a future for the nation of Israel (vv. 25-36).

As you may recall from our introduction, this eleventh chapter is all about Israel’s future. Perhaps it would be good, before proceeding this morning, to review these three chapters in Romans. Romans 9, 10, and 11 are all about the people of Israel.

**Romans chapter 9 was about Israel’s past, and the emphasis was on election.** They were sovereignly chosen by God.

**Romans chapter 10 was about Israel’s present, and the emphasis was on their rejection of God’s way of salvation by grace through faith.** Paul pointed out last week that they bore full responsibility for their own rejection of Jesus.

**Romans chapter 11 is about Israel’s future, and the major theme is restoration.** Paul explains that while Israel has been temporarily set aside, when God has completed the Church, He will turn again to Israel and they will be restored to the place of privilege and blessing as the elect people of God. **God is not finished with Israel. Far from it.** He has a rich and glorious future for them. That my friends is **the message of Romans chapter 11: God is not finished with the Jews!**

Follow along with me this morning, and let’s see why God’s promises to Israel have not failed. As believers, we can draw deep comfort from this chapter. Why? Because if God’s promises to Israel have not failed, we can rest assured that God’s promises to us will never fail either.

**Look with me at reason number one:**

## I. There Is A Remnant According To God's Gracious Choice (vv. 1-10)

If you allow your eyes to move down the page to verse 5 of Romans chapter 11 you will see the word "*remnant.*" **Do you see it?** Paul says, "There has also come to be at the present time *a remnant* according to God's gracious choice."

Now I am sure that everybody here this morning knows what a remnant is. I just happen to have a remnant of cloth with me this morning. A remnant of cloth is a small piece left over from the bolt. A remnant of people is a small remaining number. While the nation of Israel as a whole had rejected their Messiah, God had graciously chosen to save a small remaining number, a remnant according to God's gracious choice. This is a reference to Jews who have come to Him through faith in His gracious offer of salvation provided by His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul is going to prove that God always has a believing remnant. Paul gives three examples of this fact. The first example, exhibit A is Paul himself (v. 1)

### A. Paul himself (v. 1)

**1** For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul reminds his Roman readers if God had rejected His people, He would never have called Paul, an Israelite who had opposed Christ with all of his might. Paul was an Israelite, a descendant of the nations' founding patriarch, Abraham, and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was a prime example that God was continuing to extend His promise of salvation to Jews. To Jews who responded in faith to His Son, Jesus Christ, and Paul was one of them. To strengthen his point, Paul next pointed to the prophet Elijah , vv. 2-4.

### B. The Prophet Elijah (vv. 2-4)

**2** God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. **3** Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? **3** "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." **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."

This illustration from the life of Elijah comes out of I Kings 19 verses 10-18. Following a great defeat of Baal worship in Israel, Elijah fled because of a death threat issued by Jezebel. Elijah in a state of deep depression traveled south to Mount Horeb, where he was met by God. God asks Elijah, “What are you doing here?” Elijah laments that the people of the northern Kingdom, under the perverted leadership of Ahab and Jezebel, had rejected Yahweh, killed His prophets, torn down His altars, were seeking to kill him, the only believer left in all of Israel.

What is the divine response? v. 4 God informs Elijah that he is not the only righteous believer left in Israel. In fact, God had preserved a righteous remnant of seven thousand believers who had not bowed the knee to serve Baal. The preservation of a righteous remnant was the work of God’s grace. And so it is in every age.

Paul follows up his historical illustration from the life of Elijah, that God preserves a righteous remnant in every age, with an illustration from his own day, vv. 5-10

#### C. The remnant according to God’s gracious choice (vv. 5-10)

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

In the same way that God preserved a remnant of righteous believers in Elijah’s day, “even so at this present time,” Paul says, “There is a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.” Paul was only one of a vast company of Jews in his generation elected to faith by the grace of God. He knew from his church-planting activities throughout the first-century world of his day that there were Jewish converts in every church from Jerusalem to Rome. In fact, Paul’s Church plants usually began with Jewish converts.

God’s promises to the Jews have not failed. He has always had a remnant of believing Jews. It was true in Paul’s day; it was true in Elijah’s day, and it is true in our day. God always has a remnant of Jewish believers, who have placed their faith in *Yeshua*, Jesus Christ, as their Messianic Savior.

Paul adds in verse 6 that the remnant of Jewish believers in the Church were not saved on the basis of works, but solely on the basis of God’s sovereign grace, v. 6

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

Paul stresses the fact that grace and works are mutually exclusive when it comes to obtaining salvation. When we receive God's gracious salvation it results in our doing good works, but when it comes to our actual salvation, works have nothing to do with it. God's election was, always has been, and always will be established solely on the basis of grace. Our salvation can't be partly of grace and partly of works. Our salvation rests solely in God's grace. You see, grace is something freely given to someone totally undeserving. Whereas works make us deserving. This is perhaps the greatest stumbling block to fallen human beings.

**Listen to this illustration on God's grace by Dr. Charles Stanley:**

One of my more memorable seminary professors had a practical way of illustrating to his students the concept of grace. At the end of his evangelism course he would distribute the exam with the caution to read it all the way through before beginning to answer it. This caution was written on the exam as well. As we read the test, it became unquestionably clear to each of us that we had not studied nearly enough.

The further we read, the worse it became. About halfway through, audible groans could be heard through out the lecture hall. On the last page, however, was a note that read, "You have a choice. You can either complete the exam as given or sign your name at the bottom and in so doing receive an A for this assignment."

Wow? We sat there stunned. "Was he serious? Just sign it and get an A?" Slowly, the point dawned on us, and one by one we signed and turned in our tests and silently filed out of the room.

When I talked with the professor about it afterward, he shared some of the reactions he had received through the years. Some students began to take the exam without reading it all the way through, and they would sweat it out for the entire two hours of class time before reaching the last page.

Others read the first two pages, became angry, turned the test in blank, and stormed out of the room without signing it. They rejected what was freely available, and as a result, they lost out totally.

One fellow, however, read the entire test, including the note at the end, but decided to take the exam anyway. He did not want any free gifts; he wanted to earn his grade. And he did. He made a C+, but he could easily have had an A if he only accepted the professors gift.

This story illustrates many people's reaction to God's solution to sin. Some people look at God's standard—moral and ethical perfection—and throw their hands up in surrender. Why even try? they tell themselves. I could never live up to all that God requires.

Others are like the student who read the test through and was aware of the professor's offer but took the test anyway. Unwilling to simply receive God's gift of forgiveness, they set about to rack up enough points with God to earn it.

But God's grace truly is like the professor's offer. It may seem unbelievable, but if we accept it, then, like the stunned students who accepted the professor's gracious offer, we, too, will discover that, Yes, God's grace truly is free. All we have to do is accept it. **Praise God for His marvelous grace!**

Salvation by God grace through faith is at the very heart of the Gospel Paul preached. These words here in verse 6 that "salvation is by grace and not a result of works" are similar to **Ephesians 2:8-9**, which magnify the incomprehensible nature of God's saving grace: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Paul's point is that the basis of salvation is grace and the means of salvation is faith alone.

The Jewish remnant in the Church from Paul's day to the present, is made-up of Jews, who have placed their faith in, Jesus Christ as their Savior. While the nation of Israel as a whole lies faithless and fallen, a remnant of elect Jews have come to embrace Jesus of Nazareth as Savior, and as a consequence they have been added to His Church, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles.

Paul continues with a summary statement in verse 7-10 of this truth that God has always had a remnant according to His sovereign grace

**11:7** What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

While Israel as a whole has been temporarily set aside, individual Jews who believed in Jesus Christ were being saved. The rest, the nation of Israel as a whole, have been hardened. Paul provides three Old Testament quotations in verses 8-10 to explain what it means to be hardened. It is really important for us to understand that people don't refuse to believe because they have been hardened. They are hardened because they refuse to believe. We need to keep this straight in our minds.

Those who willfully and persistently reject God's grace are permitted to go on their own rebellious way; until God eventually confirms them in their unbelief. He hardens them, or makes their decision firm. This reminds me of Pharaoh, who hardened his heart until God made his decision firm. Our first quotation in verse 8 is taken from Deuteronomy 29:3-4 and Isaiah 29:10:

**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.”

Continual rejection of God's grace results in spiritual blindness and deafness

The next two OT quotations in verses 9 and 10 come from Psalm 69:22-23

**9** And David says,

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

The table, referring to God's blessing on the people of Israel, had become a snare and a stumbling block to them. Ironically the Jews' zealous pursuit of God's righteousness based on meritorious works of righteousness resulted in their rejection of God and His gracious gift of salvation by faith. The consequence was spiritual blindness and hardening forever, v. 10

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

Those Jews who refused to receive God's gracious gift by faith would suffer eternal blindness and punishment forever.

## II. There Is A Reason For Israel's Unbelief; There Are Benefits Derived From It (vv. 11-24)

Paul continues in verses 11-24, with another question he knew was on the minds of many of his readers. This is actually the same basic question as the first one back in verse 1. Look at verse 11

11:11—I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?

“They” refers to the non-believing people of Israel. Paul’s critics were asking, “Is God through with the nation of Israel? Have they fallen beyond recovery? The words “stumble so as to fall,” refers to an irreparable falling away.

Paul again responds with the very strong negative *mh\ ge÷noito*. This is the 10th and final time that Paul uses this term in Romans. His answer is: “*May it never be!*” or “*Absolutely not!*” **Israel’s stumbling = fall was and is not permanent, but only temporary.** Paul goes on to explain that there are reasons for Israel’s Unbelief; *there are two major benefits derived from their stumbling.*

The first benefit derived from Israel’s stumbling was salvation for the Gentiles, vv. 11-14

### A. Israel’s stumbling resulted in salvation for the Gentiles (vv. 11-14)

11 But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.

First of all, Paul wanted his Gentile readers to know that Israel’s stumbling had resulted in their salvation, which was designed to provoke some of his Jewish countrymen to jealousy and result in their salvation. He explains in verse 12 that if the Jews’ rejection of God’s way of salvation by grace through faith resulted in riches for the Gentile world, how much more will their eventual salvation be! As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul magnified his ministry among them.

The second benefit of Israel’s stumbling was the reconciliation of the world to God, vv 15-24

## B. Israel's rejection resulted in the reconciliation of the world (vv. 15-24)

15 For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Israel's rejection and crucifixion of her Messiah has resulted in the reconciliation of the world. Christ's death on the cross has provided reconciliation to take place between God and sinful men, who repent and receive Him by faith. Israel's future restoration to divine blessing will be a resurrection to spiritual life from their self-imposed spiritual death. The day is coming when Israel will receive Christ as their Savior and Messiah. Paul will develop this more fully next week in verses 25-32—Once the full number of Gentile believers are incorporated into the Church, then Jesus Christ will return, and the righteous remnant comprising all Israel will be saved (11:25-27; Zech. 13:8-9). Again, God is not done with Israel, but has only temporarily set them aside.

Israel's future restoration is based on her past spiritual heritage as the elect people of God. Paul used two illustration to support his argument that God is not finished with the Jews: the lump of holy dough (v. 16a), and the olive tree (vv. 16b-24)

### 1. The lump of holy dough (v. 16a; Numbers 15:17-21)

v. 16a—And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also.

This first illustration is drawn from the offering of first-fruits in Numbers 15:17-21. The Israelites were commanded to present a cake from the first of their ground meal to the Lord as a representative offering of their entire harvest. The offering was made holy because it was presented to God. The point being when God sanctifies the first piece of dough, He sanctifies the whole. The entire harvest is considered holy—set apart and blessed by God.

In relation to the nation Israel, Abraham was chosen by God as the founder of the nation, and in so doing He set apart his descendants as well. God will keep His promises to Israel because of His eternal covenant with Abraham.

### 2. The olive tree (vv. 16b-24)

16b—And if the root be holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in

among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited/arrogant, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

**Explanation:** Following Israel’s rejection and crucifixion of her Messiah, Jesus Christ, God set Israel as a whole aside temporarily, and established the Church, an action Paul describes here as the breaking off of some of the natural branches. The natural Jewish branches were broken off because they refused to come in God’s appointed way, by grace through faith, and instead they tried to offer God their own good works, rather than faith in His finished work. These natural Jewish branches have been replaced by wild olive branches, referring to Gentile Christians that have been grafted in among the natural Jewish branches because they have believed. We have put our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary, and together we all draw our sustenance from the rich root of the olive tree.

Now, the root of the olive tree is another reference to Abraham. He is the root, for salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22). God’s covenant promises to Abraham, and through him to all peoples (Gen. 22:18), will be fulfilled. Normally a branch of a cultivated olive tree is grafted into a wild olive tree, the opposite of what Paul spoke of here. But Paul knew that grafting wild branches into the cultivated tree was not the norm (though it was done). Paul confirms in v. 24 that this type of grafting was “contrary to nature.” I take this to refer to the miraculous provision of the salvation God has granted to us Gentiles, who accept His Son, Jesus Christ by faith.

Paul issues a warning to Gentiles not to become proud over their favored position, but to realize that they share in the blessings of Israel only because of faith in God’s Son. The root of Abraham supports you, you do not support

the root. This warning here does not suggest that a Christian can lose his salvation; it refers to Gentiles as a whole turning from the Gospel, much the same as Israel as a nation had done. As students of Bible prophecy, we know that this reference to Gentiles being cut off from the olive tree refers to the final apostasy or falling away from God described in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3, along with 1 Thessalonians 2. All of these passages describe the professing church in the last days, which will depart from the faith. While there is no hope for the future apostate church, there is divine hope for apostate Israel. The olive tree will flourish in Christ's Millennial Kingdom.

Paul concludes in verse 24 Since you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

If God grafted us Gentile believers into His cultivated olive tree, how much more shall Jews, who are the natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree? The day is coming, Paul says, when God will graft the nation of Israel back into their olive tree. He will restore the Jews to the place of divine blessing and privilege. How will it happen, when it happens? It will be by faith. This will be the subject of our study next Sunday morning, Lord willing. There is a sure and certain future for the nation of Israel (vv. 25-36). You can count on it friends. Why? Because God is a God of His Word. He keeps His promises. He will do what He says He will do.

**Application:** perhaps you're here this morning, and you have been going through deep water this week. I want you to know that God sees and cares about you, and what you may be going through. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Are you taking Him at His Word this morning? Perhaps you've lost your job, or need a new job. Talk to God about it, and trust Him to guide and provide for you. Perhaps you are facing financial problems, or some physical illness. Ask God for wisdom and help. He has promised to meet our every need. You can trust Him. He always keeps His Word.

Closing prayer:

**Closing song: Grace**