



What a great faith story from Rob Wertheim. Rob attends our North Campus and is one of our missions partners at CPC. Rob's story provides answers to some of the questions we're going to look at this morning. If you have a Bible, open it up to Romans 11. This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Romans. If you remember, Romans 9-11 is a unique section. This entire section deals with one single question: How does Israel fit into God's plan? Let me give a quick overview on this section: Romans 9 is about Israel's past, Romans 10 is about Israel's present, and Romans 11 is about Israel's future. Paul began these three chapters with the terrible paradox of Israel's condition; they are uniquely privileged by God but deeply rooted in unbelief.

Last week we looked at Romans 10, one of the greatest missionary passages in the entire Bible. If Romans 9 talked about God's sovereignty then Romans 10 really addresses human responsibility in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Now in Romans 11 we'll look at God's future plans for Israel: God's ultimate plan to restore Israel. Before we begin looking at this chapter I need to let you know that this is one of the most difficult chapters in Scripture to understand. We are going to read confusing passages. A 35-minute sermon isn't ample time to examine all aspects of what Paul presents here. But we can pray that we will come to know God better and worship Him more fully as a result of our time.

We need to remember that we are responsible for our acceptance or rejection of Him and His Gospel. Knowing this, Paul is going to ask three questions that we will look at together.

1. Has God rejected ethnic Israel?
2. Has ethnic Israel fallen beyond recovery?
3. What is God's plan for His people?"

Has God Rejected Ethnic Israel?

Our first question comes in the introduction of this chapter.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! (Romans 11:1a).

Immediately Paul answers this important question with an emphatic **no!** God has not rejected His own people. In the first 10 verses Paul is going to present three different arguments to support his answer.

The first argument Paul presents as a reason that God has not rejected ethnic Israel is what I call The Elijah Argument. This argument could be two arguments in itself but for the sake of time we are going to combine them into one. Paul begins this argument with a personal experience and profile.

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. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew (verses 1-2a).

Paul is a Jew. Paul is from the tribe of Benjamin and a descendant of Abraham. The first evidence that God has not rejected His own people comes directly from Paul's life. Paul is essentially saying, "God has not rejected me, so of course He has not rejected Israel."

He then goes on to further explain how God has never rejected His people. To illustrate this he gives us a summary from the life of the prophet Elijah.

Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (verses 2b-4).

The prophet Elijah was asking a similar question to God hundreds of years earlier. He has just won the showdown on Mount Carmel and had all the prophets of Baal put to death. Jezebel, the queen of Israel, was furious and put a price on Elijah's head. Elijah fled for his life and met with God on top of another mountain. Elijah cried out to God to save him and inquired about who would worship God if he was gone. God used this as an opportunity to remind Elijah that He had reserved a remnant of 7,000 Jews who had yet to bow down to the false god Baal. In other words, there has always been in Israel a "faithful remnant." We might want to call this group of people "the spiritual Israel" within ethnic Israel. Even though during Elijah's time ethnic Israel had abandoned God, God wasn't about to reject His people.

The next argument Paul presents as a reason God has not rejected Ethnic Israel is best described as The Grace Argument.

So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace (verses 5-6).

Just as there was a remnant in Israel during the time of Elijah, there was still a remnant at the time Paul was writing the letter to the church in Rome. We read that this remnant has been chosen by grace. Paul is not saying this remnant of ethnic Israelites is chosen by good works they have accomplished. This remnant isn't chosen because they have followed all the 613 laws in the Torah.

God's reason for choosing them is quite contrary. This isn't about works and following laws, but grace. The grace of God was a consistent message throughout Paul's entire ministry. He was a

recipient of this grace. He has never forgotten about the grace he received on the Damascus road as he traveled to persecute Christ-followers. With this knowledge close at hand, he was a communicator of the grace he had received. Did you know Paul also wrote a similar reminder of grace to the church in Ephesus? He told them that it is by grace you are saved, through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8).

If salvation is simply by grace then it's impossible for it to be by works. Salvation can't be obtained by following laws or obeying the law. Salvation is freely given to those who place their trust in Jesus Christ. It is a gift of grace. If it were by works, then how could it be grace? The best definition of grace I've ever heard is, "Grace is getting what we don't deserve." This week I experienced grace. I was summoned to jury duty but after calling in I was excused from my civic duty. It was a gift of grace for me because I got what I didn't deserve. We all know that getting out of jury duty is a gift of grace! This is the second argument Paul gives us to let us know God isn't finished with His people.

The third argument Paul presents as a reason God hasn't rejected ethnic Israel is what we can call The Proud Heart Argument.

What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, (v. 7).

There is an interesting phenomena here. The phenomena is a person can try so hard to please and serve God that he or she comes to adamantly resist the idea of Grace. Israel earnestly sought the righteousness of God. As time progressed they attempted to accomplish this by works which ultimately led to a hardening of hearts. Not all of Israel experienced a hard heart. Paul refers to this group that he calls "the elect." The elect received the gift by grace while the vast majority had a hard heart. Personally, I don't think the ones who currently have hardened their heart to God always had a hard heart. I think they are people who, at one time, radically experienced God's grace, but as time went on, pride snuck in and they begin relying on their own abilities; their hearts became hard. Paul gives two different Old Testament examples to explain this.

as it is written:

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

And David says:

**"May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.
May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever" (verses 8-10).**

The imagery is not easy to interpret. Paul presents these examples to show that ethnic Israel had actually hardened themselves to God. Their pride and arrogance has lead to hardened hearts. So what we ultimately find out is that God hasn't rejected ethnic

Israel at all! But they have hardened their hearts to God. What we end up seeing is God won't give up on His people; He is faithful!

Has Ethnic Israel Fallen Beyond Recovery?

It is not God who rejected ethnic Israel but Israel who was hardened to God. It provokes our next question: Has ethnic Israel fallen beyond recovery? Is Israel so hardened to God that they can never come back by grace? The answer is another emphatic **no**. Paul proceeds to give us an example of what ethnic Israel's rejection has done for the Gentiles. Their rejection has opened salvation to us. Then he will let us know what the salvation of the Gentiles has done for ethnic Israel. It's a pinball effect that we're going to see occurring here. Israel's rejection of God has brought salvation to the Gentiles.

Again 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. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! (verses 11-12).

Because not all Israelites accepted Christ as the Messiah this opened a door for us Gentiles to believe. If you read the book of Acts you will see a pattern in the missionary journeys. First, they go to the Jewish synagogue and preach the Gospel. Some Jews accept Jesus as Messiah and others reject Him. After this there is a fracture in the Jewish community which leads to the disciples preaching to the Gentiles. This leads to salvation for some Gentiles. Our final product is a multi-ethnic church and this pattern is repeated in other cities. Because of Jewish rejection of the Messiah, salvation is available to Gentiles. This same thing is going to be repeated twice in the next four verses. Paul continues this by restating the same thing.

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them (verses 13-14).

Paul is the pastor to the Gentiles but his desire is for ethnic Israel to become envious because of Gentile salvation. This sounds confusing. When we think about being envious we think of it in a negative term. We think of envying our boss's salary, our neighbor's home or our friend's vacation. Paul wants to teach us that not all envy is tainted by human selfishness. The base of the word envy is "to have something that belongs to another person." To envy is really to desire something someone else has. Most of the time we are envious it is sinful. We all know this. But for Paul to desire the Israelites to have salvation due to seeing the life-change God is doing in the lives of the Gentiles, this is a noble desire, not a sinful desire. The desire is pure in motive, especially when we understand how Paul is using it.

Listen to this example from the book of Acts. As the early church became established and appointed people into roles, we are told that deacons were installed to help with the distribution of food for the poor. The priests—Jewish priests—took notice of this and became believers (Acts 6:7). It seems safe to say that they

were envious, in a healthy way, of what the new believers had and this spurred in them a desire to be a part of the early church.

Paul goes on to share how ethnic Israel's rejection of the Messiah brought about reconciliation for the entire world!

For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches (verses 15-16).

Are you seeing the repetition? Paul has gone as far this time to say that Israel not only has a hardened heart but has rejected God. Their rejection has brought about reconciliation for others. Reconciliation is all about restoring broken relationships. Listen to what Dave Hunt says about reconciliation, "In Christ alone, and His payment of the penalty for our sins upon the Cross, we find reconciliation to God and ultimate meaning and purpose." Some of you are here this morning and your relationship with God is fractured. You need to be reconciled to Christ and we're glad you're here.

Paul finishes this question with an example of Jewish horticulture to drive home his point. He talks about the grafting of a wild olive branch into an existing olive tree.

If 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, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in" (verses 17-19).

In his illustration, the existing olive tree represents Israel. It was dying because of Israel's continued rejection of God. The branches were being pulled out of the stump for not bearing fruit. Because of Israel's hardening of heart, God began grafting in wild olive branches. Once these wild branches were grafted in they began to thrive and the roots of the ancient stump were regenerated because of the new sap. This process enabled the shoots and the roots to perform what they were created to do. But there is a warning to the shoots.

Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either (verses 20-21).

The shoots, that is us Gentiles, need to remember that it is the roots who support us. The roots of a tree always support the shoots, not the other way around. It sounds like Paul is encouraging us to remain humble in our position so that we too aren't pulled out. I thought back in Romans 8 that Paul said, "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ?" Is Paul saying we can lose our salvation? We must remember that our sustainability is based on faith alone. God's desire is for Israel to return to Him.

Consider 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. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After 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! (verses 22-24).

Paul calls us to consider, or meditate, on the kindness and sternness of God. The key word in these passages from verse 23 is persist. God has no desire for His people to persist in unbelief. We must never downplay the grace and kindness of God in our lives and hold fast to it.

I'm a massive C.S. Lewis fan. For the last couple of months I've been reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* with my kids. In the final book *The Last Battle*, Eustace and Jill are helping the last king of Narnia. Through a series of unfortunate events Narnia is conquered and the end of time occurs where the children enter the real Narnia. As they are talking with each other they realize their sister and friend Susan is not present. After greeting all the people King Tirian says, "If I have read the chronicles alright, there should be another. Has not your Majesty two sisters? Where is the Queen Susan?" "My sister Susan," answers Peter shortly and gravely, "is no longer a friend of Narnia."

As I read this part to my daughter she looked at me puzzled and asked, "What happened to Susan?" Lewis goes on to share that Susan dismissed Narnia as a childish game she once played with her siblings. This is what Paul is talking about. We must persist in our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord. The answer to our second question is, "Of course ethnic Israel hasn't fallen beyond recovery." Remember, God won't give up on His people; He is faithful!

What is God's Plan for His People?

This leads us to our final question, "What is God's plan for His people?" God's plan is for His people to turn to Him and find salvation through Jesus Christ.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;

he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them

when I take away their sins" (verses 25-27).

This is a tricky section here that is filled with theological pot-holes. Paul returns to address his readers directly again. His first warning is to not be conceited. Paul has warned the church about boasting in verse 18 and arrogance in verse 20. Now they are warned not to become conceited.

We cannot fully understand everything here. Although we will gain a better understanding when we get to verses 26 and 27, starting in verse 25 we're reminded that Israel has experienced a hardening of heart, as we talked about in verse 7. This hardening has turned out to be a benefit for us Gentiles. Their hardening of

heart was due to their stubbornness. While Israel remains stubborn, the Gospel is preached and more people are being added to God's family.

This brings us to verse 26, "*all Israel will be saved.*" Who does Paul mean? Does he mean that every single Israelite will be saved? Paul has been talking about ethnic Israel. He is still talking about ethnic Israel. "All Israel" probably doesn't mean every single Jew without exception. God's plan, as it always has been, is to save Israel. But, obviously not every single Jewish person will be saved. Paul touched on this back in Romans 9:6 when he wrote, "*It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*" Not every Israelite will be saved but those who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Messiah will be saved. Paul will elaborate more in the next few verses.

By the way, I don't think this has anything to do with politics or land. Nor is there any hint of a special way of salvation for the Jews, as some believe. What it means is some day in the future—I don't know when—there will be a revival among the Jews. We'll hear more and more stories like Rob Wertheim's, of Jewish people placing their faith in Jesus. In some ways, we are already starting to see this happen. God is working mightily within the Jewish people and bringing them to faith in Jesus the Messiah. And organizations like Jews for Jesus are on the front lines of that ministry. God has not given up on His people and neither should we.

The Israelites who will be saved are the ones who accept this message. They are looking for the deliverer who will come from Zion (v. 26). This deliverer is clearly Jesus. Some Israelites will turn away from godlessness. The deliverer will establish God's covenant with them to take away their sins. Think about it like this: The deliverer will come from Zion to bring people to repentance according to God's covenant. It's not a national salvation of all of Israel but a salvation for those who confess with their mouth and believe in their heart that Jesus Christ is Lord and God has raised Him from the dead.

Paul returns to this interesting relationship between Jews and Gentiles, this contrasting relationship that causes the other to draw closer to God.

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

everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all (verses 28-32).

He is still focused on unbelieving Israel. Remember this whole chapter is about Israel's future. Israel is still loved on behalf of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These verses about disobedience are carefully constructed. Paul is communicating that there is still hope for Israel.

There is a relationship here between mercy and disobedience. It is God's mercy that draws us back in our disobedience. Mercy can simply mean "not getting what we deserve." We don't deserve mercy. We deserve death from our disobedient actions, but because of God's mercy to us, in our disobedience we have found home in Him. The answer to our third question is, "God's plan is for as many Israelites as possible to return to Him."

We looked at three deep questions this morning. Let's review them and their answers:

Has God rejected ethnic Israel?

No! God has not rejected His own people.

Has ethnic Israel fallen beyond recovery?

No! Of course not.

What is God's plan for His people?

God's plan is for as many Israelites as possible to return to Him.

I'm aware we haven't talked about practical applications for us; we have touched on some but I want to remind us of this: Our salvation is purely based on the grace of God. No matter how hard we try to work to "earn" God's favor it won't happen. We need to be Christ-followers who live in grace. We need to embrace that through the death and resurrection of Christ we are getting what we do not deserve. If that wasn't enough, instead of getting death for our disobedience we have received mercy. Sometimes the mercy of God is too much to bear, it's hard to stand under the weight of it. We feel like we need to do something to pay God back, but we can't. This is where we stand in His grace.

Let's be a church community who lives our lives with such integrity that others are envious and it draws them to God. Let's be a church community who is so full of grace that people start inviting themselves to come to lunch with us to hear more about the love of God. Let's be a church community who is so defined by love that our neighbors come to our homes to see if they can come to church with us on Easter. Don't forget that God won't give up on His people; He is faithful!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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