



I'm so glad we got to hear Rob Wertheim's faith story as a Jewish Christian. He and his wife Sandy and their daughter attend our church and work for a great ministry called Jews for Jesus. We wanted you to hear Rob's story because that is exactly what we are talking about today. As we continue our series in the book of Romans, remember, chapters 9-11 are a unique section in this letter that deals with one single question: How does ethnic Israel, the Jewish people, fit into God's plan? Is Rob's story of coming to faith in Jesus the Messiah atypical? Or are stories like that just the tip of the iceberg in what God wants to do with Jewish people?

This is not just some interesting material about what's going to happen to Israel, God's chosen people. There are some incredible principles we'll learn about the character and nature of God. Have you ever struggled to trust God's faithfulness? Have you ever felt like He abandoned you? There is no greater illustration of God's faithfulness throughout the entire Scripture than we can see in His relationship with the nation of Israel. This chapter is about what's going to happen to Israel in the future and how God is going to fulfill the promises He's made to them all along. God hasn't given up on His people; He's faithful! And if that is true, it means God won't give up on you either! Let's read Romans 11:1–10.

Did God Reject Israel?

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. 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." 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.

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

Did God reject His people Israel? Paul answers by using very strong language in the Greek and says "By no means!" In no way has God permanently rejected Israel. The apostle then spends the rest of the chapter defending why he believes that to be true. He gives three different proofs of this fact. The first one is personal. Paul himself is proof that God is not done with His people. He describes his own Jewish pedigree, "I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin." He's saying, "Since I am both a Jew and a Christian, this proves that Jewish Christians exist. In fact, God has chosen me to reach the Jews through my ministry to the Gentiles."

In verses 2–5 Paul uses the example of Elijah to further prove his faithfulness. There is a remnant, a small group of Jews, who he has set aside. They have believed God and have been faithful to Him even when there's been unfaithfulness and idolatry from the majority of Jews. The story in 1 Kings 19 is about Elijah, the great prophet of God. All of Israel were worshiping a false god called Baal. One day on Mt. Carmel there were 400 prophets of Baal and one prophet of God. So, Elijah challenged them, "You call on your god and see if he'll bring down fire on the sacrifice and I'll pray to my God. Whichever god answers, that's who the nation will worship." The false prophets marched around all day and prayed and nothing happened. Then it was Elijah's turn. He offered a bull on the altar and even poured water on it. Soon after, God sent a tremendous fire on the offering and there was a spiritual revival and the whole nation turned back to God. Elijah was not afraid of 400 prophets of Baal.

In the very next chapter we see one woman, Jezebel, say, "I don't like what Elijah did." And Elijah who was not afraid of 400 prophets of Baal is terrified. He took off, ran to the other side of the desert and has a pity party. "Oh, God. Poor me!" I call this the Elijah Syndrome. It's when you think you're the only one. You're the only Christian at your school, at your job, or in your neighborhood going through it. Elijah complains to God, in

1 Kings 19:10, *"Your people have forsaken Your covenant."* Paul uses that story as an illustration to remind us what God said to him, "Elijah, there are at least 7000 other true Jews in the nation who did not bow down to those false gods during that time." God has always had a small group of believers throughout history who trust Him and believe in Him, even when it seems like the whole world has completely turned away from Him. Today is no different.

Paul elaborates on this in verses 5-6 and says there is still today a remnant chosen by grace and not by works. God chose Israel, not because they had it all together or because they were super religious or great people or performed well (because they really did not perform well). God chose them because He chose them. He chose them by grace. God's relationship with Israel was never based on them keeping their part of the bargain and following God at all times. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, *"Go, proclaim this message toward the north: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the Lord, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,' declares the Lord, 'I will not be angry forever'"* (Jer. 3:12). And Paul wrote to Timothy something similar, *"If we are faithless he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself"* (2 Tim.2:13).

In verses 7-10 Paul explains what's been going on with Israel. He says they've been hardened because of their own rejection of God. Israel was hardened because they earnestly pursued righteousness by trying to establish their own instead of receiving it as a gift from God through Jesus Christ. Some, the elect, the remnant, did receive righteousness as a gift, but most rejected it. As a result of their rejection, their hearts were hardened. The idea here is that God gives people up to their own stubbornness. Pride and self-centeredness was Israel's downfall and it's ours too.

Remember the Prodigal Son's older brother? The good boy, who stayed home, worked hard, and obeyed his father? Once the Prodigal Son came home from partying in Las Vegas, after asking for forgiveness, the father throws a huge celebration for him. The older son was infuriated and wouldn't even go to the party. His heart was hardened. The point of the story is that both sons were lost! Pastor Tim Keller put it this way, "This is the case with many people around the world today. Very sincere religious people (whether Jews or Hindus or Muslims and so on), for example, misguidedly reject the gospel because it seems to weaken the need for moral effort." Even though Israel rejected God, God did not reject them. In fact, there has always been a remnant chosen by grace, a small group of God-lovers that remain faithful.

That brings us to our next question, Has Israel stumbled beyond recovery? To answer that question, Paul addresses the Gentiles and gives them an illustration of an olive tree. Look with me at verses 11-24.

Has Israel Stumbled Beyond Recovery?

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!

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. 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.

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." 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.

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!

Has Israel stumbled beyond recovery? Absolutely not. Their stumbling is only temporary. You can stumble and get tripped up, but not fall over. That's the idea here. God has used their stumbling to graft the Gentiles into the family of God. Paul gives several reasons why Israel's stumbling benefited the Gentiles. He says first, Israel stumbled so that the Gentiles could be saved, "Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles..." Second, Jewish stumbling that brought salvation to the Gentiles, will in turn make Israel envious, "salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." What does Paul mean?

Pastor Chuck Swindoll gives a great illustration of this: "Let's say you were a dishwasher at a country club and you have no rights or privileges at all. A bunch of Israeli businessmen come in and you serve them a beautiful banquet meal. But they start talking

among themselves, 'We don't want to eat this right now. Let's go play some golf. We don't want this food. We'll set it aside.' They leave without touching their plates. In the meantime, the owner of the restaurant comes in and says to the dishwashers, 'They left those good meals out there. I don't want them to go to waste. You guys go eat them.' So you walk in, not paid for it, not deserved it, you don't even have a membership to the country club. You eat the meal and the owner locks the door. Halfway to the golf course the Israeli guys say, 'Maybe we had better go back and eat the meal.' They come back and find the doors locked. They look inside and see the busboys eating their dinner. They become angry."

God gave salvation to the Jews first but, but because they rejected Him and Jesus the Messiah, God gave it to others to provoke Jews to jealousy. Theologian Johannes Munck, in his book *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, writes, "However strange it may sound, the way to the salvation of Israel is by the mission to the Gentiles" (pg. 301). Paul says, he takes pride in his ministry to the Gentiles because his hope is that through them, Israel might finally come to salvation.

Another question is: What should our attitude be toward ethnic Israel? One of the reasons this letter was written to the church in Rome was because there was some tension between Gentiles and Jewish Christians. In Rome, Gentile believers were becoming more and more prideful of their position as the New Israel, the people of God. People of grace, not race. They were even looking down on and treating Jews harshly. To deal with this issue, Paul gives us an illustration of a grafted olive tree. This is a picture of an old olive tree in the village of Nazareth that has been grafted. Notice the huge stump and the younger branches coming from it. I've been told that olive trees can grow to thousands of years old. And olive trees that had been dormant for hundreds of years can even start producing fruit again.

Paul uses an olive tree to remind both Jews and Gentiles of God's purposes. The Jewish people (the original root and stump of the tree) were cut off because of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus. And Gentiles (the wild branches) were grafted in through their faith in Jesus. With the Gentiles being grafted in, new life will come to the old tree. Jews will one day again become part of the tree by accepting Jesus. As branches, Gentiles should not become arrogant of their position because they rely on the root of the Jews. And if they are not careful, God can cut them off! Paul's reminding Gentiles of our heritage as Christians that came from the Jews. Jesus Himself was a Jew from the root of King David. And it was Jesus who told the woman of Samaria at the well that, "salvation is from the Jews." Paul says we've been grafted in so don't be prideful. The great 20th Century scholar Karl Barth put it this way, "Jews have God's promise and if we Christians have it, too, then it is only as those chosen with them, as guests in their

house, that we are new wood grafted onto their tree." Instead of pride, we owe the Israelites a huge debt of gratitude.

After a strong warning in verses 22-24 to Gentile Christians not to become prideful, Paul gives a promise to Jewish unbelievers. His argument is that if those grafted in could be cut off, then doesn't it follow that those who were cut off could be grafted in again? Grafting a natural/original branch back (aka Israel) into its own tree is much easier than a wild branch (aka Gentiles). The idea that Israel can fully be restored into God's plan brings us to the last question on Paul's mind: What is God's plan for Israel? He answers that in verses 25-32.

What's God's Plan for Israel?

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."

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.

This is a tricky section filled with theological potholes. What is the "mystery"? What does the "full number of Gentiles" mean? Does Paul really believe that "all Israel will be saved"? Let's look at those questions. The mystery is the good news that in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are equally part of the family of God. The phrase "full number" is actually one word meaning "fullness" or "completion." As Israel continues to reject Jesus, more and more Gentiles are coming to Him in faith. Paul seems to be saying that a tipping point will be reached which will trigger a massive move of God within the Jewish people. God's plan, as it always has been, is to save Israel. But, obviously not every single Jewish person will be saved. He's not saying that. Israel as a whole, as a nation, will be saved. 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. 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.

Finally, in verses 27-32 Paul explains how we should view Jewish non-Christians. We first must view them in love. God loves them because of His promises to their ancestors, the "patriarchs." We are also to view them with hope because God's gifts (His promises) and His call (His commitment to make Israel His people again) are irrevocable; they will not be changed. And the last thing Paul says is the same mercy that brought in the disobedient Gentiles will finally bring in the now disobedient Israel. God will have mercy on them all! That's what Romans 11 is all about. Israel is an example that God won't give up on His people. He is faithful and will keep all His promises.

The Israelites, the Jews as a nation, are a miracle, in spite of literally thousands of years of persecution and difficult situations.

From 586 B.C. well into the A.D. years it was controlled by other people. Yet the Jews are still around. I think that is a testimony to the faithfulness of God. It's a miracle that they're still alive.

Some of you are here this morning and deep down you believe God has given up on you. Maybe because you are dealing with something really difficult and painful. Suffering can do that to people. Pain can often cause us to wonder if God has rejected us. And our unfaithfulness leads us to believe that he is going to reject us. But, if it's true that God has not given up on Israel, if God is really faithful to keep all His promises, then isn't it also true He'll do the same for you. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are His child, His chosen sons and daughters. You are the true Israel, people of grace, not race. God has not given up on you; He's 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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