

Romans Part 35 – Chapter 11:1-17

Sunday, December 11, 2022

With input from <https://www.bibleref.com/Romans/11>, John MacArthur

Review

Paul ends chapter 10 with verses 20 & 21;

And Isaiah is very bold and says,

“I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,

I REVEALED MYSELF TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.”

²¹ But as for Israel, He says, “I HAVE SPREAD OUT MY HANDS ALL DAY LONG TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”

And, we ended with these thoughts:

Faith in Christ is more than an opportunity to be declared righteous by God. It is His command. Israel said no. This, in fact, is the root cause of all unbelief: a deliberate choice to disobey, reject, or ignore what God has told us (Romans 1:18–20; John 5:39–40; John 7:17).

We recalled Stephen’s last words before he was stoned from **Acts 7:51-53**: *“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”*

John MacArthur:

“You come into the New Testament and that blindness is mentioned again and again and again. And so this hard-hearted, stiff-necked, stubborn, callous, blindness, reaches its zenith in the rejection of Jesus Christ. As centuries and centuries and centuries of stiff-necked, stubborn, hard resistance to God culminates in an inability to discern the Messiah and a rejection of Him. And Jesus on the cross looks out over them and says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." That's right. They didn't know what they were doing. They didn't know it was the Messiah, they didn't know. They couldn't know. They were blind, so ignorant, so unbelieving, so in love with their sin. And that's why Jesus said to them so often, "I would have gathered but you would not." Self-imposed ignorance.”

Romans 11:1-3:

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? Far from it! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. 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 YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.”

Let's revisit that story:

1 Kings 18:17-40

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, the cause of disaster to Israel?" 18 He said, "I have not brought disaster to Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. 19 Now then, send orders and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

20 So Ahab sent orders among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21 Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long are you going to struggle with the two choices? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

But the people did not answer him so much as a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left as a prophet of the Lord, while Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23 Now have them give us two oxen; and have them choose the one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people replied, "That is a good idea."

25 So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose the one ox for yourselves and prepare it first, since there are many of you, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under the ox." 26 Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it, and they called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice and no one answered. And they limped about the altar which they had made. 27 And at noon Elijah ridiculed them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, since he is a god; undoubtedly he is attending to business, or is on the way, or is on a journey. Perhaps he is asleep, and will awaken." 28 So they cried out with a loud voice, and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until blood gushed out on them. 29 When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and [l]no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come forward to me." So all the people came forward to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. 31 Then Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." 32 And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. 33 Then he laid out the wood, and he cut the ox in pieces and placed it on the wood. 34 And he said, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time," so they did it a second time. Then he said, "Do it a third time," so they did it a third time. 35 The water flowed around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water.

Elijah's Prayer

36 Then at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet approached and said, "Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that You, Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood, and the stones and the dust; and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God!" 40 Then Elijah said to them,

“Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slaughtered them there.

1 Kings 19:1-18:

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, and [a]how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more so, if by about this time tomorrow I do not make your life like the life of one of them.” 3 And he was afraid, and got up and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah; and he left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked for himself to die, and said, “Enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

5 Then he lay down and fell asleep under a broom tree; but behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, “Arise, eat!” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a round loaf of bread baked on hot coals, and a pitcher of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 But the angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him, and said, “Arise, eat; because the journey is too long for you.” 8 So he arose and ate and drank, and he journeyed in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Elijah at Horeb

9 Then he came there to a cave and spent the night there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life.”

11 So He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord was passing by! And a great and powerful wind was tearing out the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of a gentle blowing. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 Then he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life.”

*15 The Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 You shall also anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. 17 And it shall come about that the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 **Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal** and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*

Romans 11:3: *“Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.”*

Now in verse 4 Paul answers his own question from verse 3:

Romans 11:4-17:

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." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, since otherwise grace is no longer grace.

Paul restates what grace means. He wants to dispel any notion that any Israelites stand with God because of their own works. They don't. Grace means receiving an unearned gift. It is always given and never paid for. The idea that a person's work—such as keeping the law—could in some way contribute to receiving God's grace is a self-contradicting idea. If that were possible, grace would not be grace, Paul writes.

Those who remain as the remnant of faithful Israel understand that they have not been saved by their works. They have come to God by faith in Christ.

While this verse is meant to prove a point about God and Israel, it also draws a clear line in terms of theology. There is no gray area between works-based salvation and grace-based salvation. None. Any dependence on works—adherence to the law, undergoing rituals, performing sacraments, or good deeds—is a rejection of grace. This is an often-resisted truth, but it is the clear teaching of Scripture. If works, in any sense, contribute to salvation, then that salvation is no longer "by grace." Paul's point, here, is that because salvation is, in fact, by grace, works have absolutely zero part to play in securing it.

7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 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."*

Paul follows his pattern of supporting his arguments with quotes from the Old Testament—the Jewish Scriptures. He has just written that God has hardened most Israelites in regard to faith in Christ.

To show that God has always done this, even with Israel, Paul seems to assemble the quote in this verse from Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4. In both instances, God was said to have kept Israel from understanding what was true. The people were overcome by a spirit of stupor, or sleepiness, and were not given eyes to see and ears to hear. God was the one who kept them from understanding.

Again, some might ask if this is fair on God's part. Paul made clear in Romans 9, however, that God retains the right to give or withhold understanding, to soften or harden hearts, as He sees fit and for His greater purposes. Just as Pharaoh was resistant to God, and so God enhanced that resistance, Israel's "hardening" comes as part of God's overall plan to fulfill His own purposes.

9 And David says,

*“May their table become a snare and a trap,
And a stumbling block and a retribution to them.
10 May their eyes be darkened to see not,
And bend their backs continually.”*

Now Paul quotes from David's Psalm 69, a psalm that is often described as being about Christ Himself. In that sense, then, the verses quoted here could point to the enemies of Christ. In that way, Paul suggests Psalm 69:22–23 could apply to those Jewish people who have rejected faith in Christ.

Paul then uses David's words to suggest that these Jewish unbelievers would be trapped and tripped up and punished by their own "table" when they think they are at peace. They would be fooled into complacency, although they are in mortal danger. Paul seems to add the idea of a stumbling block to the quote, connecting it to Isaiah 8:14, which he also quoted in Romans 9:33.

11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? Far from it! But by their wrongdoing salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their wrongdoing proves to be riches for the world, and their failure, riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

This verse begins a new section. Paul is answering the question, "why?" Why would God cause most Israelites to be hardened to faith in Christ and, in that way, to miss out on God's righteousness?

Paul asks if God caused them to stumble over Christ, the stumbling stone (Romans 9:32–33) in order to make them fall down. In other words, Paul asks if God caused Israel to be tripped up in order that they might permanently fall—never to rise again. Was that what God wanted for Israel? Paul answers his own question once more with a rousing "By no means!"

Instead, God has two purposes for Israel's stumbling over Christ by refusing to believe in Him. First, Israel's trespass, or sin, made it possible for salvation to come to the Gentiles. That sin was a refusal, on a national level, to obey the gospel of faith in Jesus (Romans 10:16). When Israel rejected Christ, God used that rejection to make His offer of salvation by grace through faith in Christ available to all people.

God's second purpose, though, was to make Israel jealous. Paul introduced this idea in Romans 10:19. God plans to use this—jealousy of a close relationship with God enjoyed by Gentiles—to provoke many Jewish people to eventually come to Him, as well, also through faith in Christ.

13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Therefore, insofar as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 if somehow I may move my own people to jealousy and save some of them.

Now Paul addresses Gentiles directly. Paul describes his identity and purpose to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Christ Himself gave this role to Paul in **Acts 9:15-16**: *But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer in behalf of My name.”*

Paul writes that he magnifies his ministry to take the good news about faith in Jesus to all Gentiles. In other words, he glorifies his ministry. He goes big. He works hard at it. He is bold and strategic and amplifies the message of God's grace for the Gentiles through faith in Christ.

In part, he does this to provoke jealousy among his own Jewish people. He wants to see them saved, to have the same special relationship with God that the Gentiles have now received.

Paul himself was a "Hebrew among Hebrews" (Philippians 3:4–7), he was converted (Acts 9:1–6) in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the non-Jewish people: the Gentiles. An apostle is a person sent to represent another with an important message. In Paul's case, that message is that the Gentiles can be saved and come into relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Paul wants his fellow Jewish people to see that and want it too. Some will come to faith in Christ in that way, Paul believes.

15 For if their rejection proves to be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are as well.

Paul writes that it will mean life from the dead.

Paul seems to be saying that God's eventual acceptance of Israel is somehow connected to the idea of resurrection, perhaps the future resurrection of the bodies of all who are in Christ at some future moment. The exact meaning of "life from the dead," however, is debated by Bible scholars.

John Piper: Keep in mind these are only pictures and analogies. If you press the details of any analogy too far, you miss the one main point they are trying to make. For example, if you press either of these comparisons too far you might say that since a portion of Israel is holy to the Lord, every individual Israelite who ever lived would be saved. That would contradict numerous things Paul says. Or you might say Paul means that there can be no unhealthy branches that need to be broken off—no unbelieving Israel—since he says "the branches are holy."

But if we take the pictures more generally we can see the point that he is making with both of them in this context. He is saying: At the beginning of Israel's history God chose and set apart for himself Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are the "dough offered as first fruits" and "the root." "If the dough offered as first fruits is holy . . ." "If the root is holy . . ." Holy here would mean: Devoted to the Lord, set apart from the nations, and dedicated as a special possession of God. So the patriarchs were singled out by God and made his own special possession, devoted to him in the obedience of covenant faithfulness. He was their God and they were his people.

Then he says that the holiness of the dough offered as firstfruits and that the holiness of the root implies the holiness of the whole lump and the whole tree. In the context, the most natural meaning for this is: Paul's confidence that one day all Israel will be saved—that some future generation of Israel will turn to Christ and believe—is implied in the original election and covenant commitment made to Israel at the beginning. In other words, Israel's holiness—her being chosen and set apart for God at the beginning—implies that in the end this people as a whole will be holy, that is, will trust Christ and belong to God as a saved part of the one true people of God.

Romans 11:28 gives a strong confirmation of this interpretation. "As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake." That means just what we have seen in verse 11: "through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles." They are rejecting the gospel so that the gospel will spread with power to the nations of the world. But verse 28 goes on: "But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers" (Romans 11:28).

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.

Paul has said to Gentile Christians that they have been grafted into the tree of God's special relationship with Israel. Now, he says Gentiles must not be arrogant toward the Jewish "branches."

Perhaps some of the Gentile Christians of Paul's day were being harsh or dismissive about the lack of faith in Christ among most Jewish people. Since some in Israel's leadership were persecuting Christians, it's understandable that some Christians would lash back against them. Even today, there are those who attempt—falsely—to justify antisemitism through Israel's rejection of Jesus.

Paul doesn't want these Gentile believers to miss an essential truth, however. They are the ones being "artificially" inserted into a relationship with God. This is happening only by His grace and through faith in Christ. These Gentiles are not nearly the first to have a special relationship with God. They are not the root: the vital, life-giving source of the plant, taken from the Greek term *rhiza*.

In the flow of this passage, the "root" is likely the patriarchs of Israel who received God's promises. Those roots, and the trunk which now grows from it are what supports these new Gentile Christians. They, the grafted-in branches, do not give life to the rest of the tree. Humility about Israel's special and ongoing relationship with God is the only response that makes sense for non-Jewish believers.