

Israel's Failure is Not Total

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 11:1-10

Preached on: Sunday, June 17, 2012

Will you join me by taking your Bibles and turning to Romans chapter 11? We now embark upon an amazing section of Scripture. It has a lot of very deep and rich theology so therefore this morning you must give me your undivided attention. You must concentrate. I am here to feed you and to teach you, not entertain you. And after we go through a lot of this rich theology, then we will close with some challenges where I will also encourage you and perhaps call you to repentance, ok?

Israel's failure is not total. That is the title of my discourse to you this morning. And Paul addresses this now in Romans chapter 11. We will be looking at the verse 10 verses here this morning. Follow along as I read the text.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 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? "LORD, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT FOR MYSELF SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 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." And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."¹

So I ask you. Is God finished with his covenant people Israel? Has the New Testament Church now replaced Israel? Does the New Testament Church now fulfill the nation Israel's place and role in the plan of God? Well, many believers will say yes to this. They hold to a position known as replacement theology. A more technical name is supercessionism, the idea that the Church has superseded Israel. It also goes by names like Augustinian eschatology. It is Roman Catholic eschatology, Amillennialism, a variation of it is Postmillennialism and so forth. They would argue that because Israel rejected her Messiah that God has permanently abandoned them as a people, that, therefore, the unconditional promises that God made to Abraham, although sworn to and

¹ Romans 11:1-10.

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affirmed by God with himself according to Genesis 15 are no longer to be fulfilled literally, but rather they are to be fulfilled spiritually, that ethnic, national and territorial Israel is now all absorbed in the universal Christian Church, thus, eliminating their national identity. The Church, they would say, is spiritual Israel. And now we are living spiritually in the messianic kingdom that was once promised to Israel to be realized physically.

Now to defend that system they must reject the principles of literal, grammatical, historical interpretation that you would use to interpret all non prophetic prophecies. But when they come to the prophetic Scriptures they would interpret it more as an allegory and that system would be one that spiritualizes the Word of God and, thus, imposes upon it the fanciful imaginations of the interpreter. And, as a result of this, you have widely divergent interpretations that I believe are utterly bereft of authority and certainly of clarity.

So there are those who would reject the normal, plain meaning of language and impose upon the text what they think it means. They would literally say, well, yes, I know that is what God says, but that is not really what he meant. Let me tell you what he means.

I cannot claim such apostolic authority. Ironically most of our brethren—and some of them are very close friends of mine—perhaps some here within the sound of my voice in this room—who hold this view embrace what is commonly referred to as covenant theology. Yet by implication their position would argue that because of sin God cannot be trusted to be faithful in honoring his covenants. Obviously I am convinced that replacement theology is an unbiblical doctrine that violates the explicit statements in both the Old and the New Testaments that teach and affirm a massive national salvation and restoration of Israel when Christ returns in all of his glory.

Now, sadly, by the fourth century replacement theology was so pervasive that the Church father Augustine, along with most of the Christian Church of that day, fully believed that the Church was the earthly representation of the heavenly city of God in anticipation of a heavenly consummation. And this was reinforced by Augustine's famous yet obviously mistaken interpretation of Psalm 59:11. There it reads:

“Do not slay them...”²

And he interpreted them as being the Jews rather than the wicked.

“Do not slay them, lest my people forget; Scatter them by Thy power.”³

In other words, make them homeless wanderers.

² Psalm 59:11.

³ Ibid.

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“...and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.”⁴

And so Augustine wrongly interpreted David’s enemies to be the Jews which therefore must become the enemies of the Church and, by implication, the Church must now reinforce some kind of divine humiliation upon the Jews and assist God in making his covenant people vagabonds over the earth, permanently disbursed, permanently disgraced and despised.

Years later the reformers came along and they rightly adopted Augustine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. But with it came the baggage of replacement theology, errant Roman Catholic eschatology. And that position began to be the dominant position in the Church. By the 15th century in his last sermon just before his death an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther pleaded that all Jews should be expelled from Germany. And, perhaps you would understand now the predisposition of the Church when Hitler came along.

Over the years the allegorizing method used to justify this kind of thinking has been legitimized in the minds of many because it has been adorned with the trappings of erudition, that somehow only the scholars can grasp the deeper meanings that escape the simple minds of we uneducated pedestrians that merely interpret Scripture on the basis of the normal meaning of language. But I would argue that unless you reject the normal plain meaning of language it is obvious that the apostle Paul, a converted rabbi did not hold to replacement theology, but he saw a distinction between God’s plan for Israel and the Church.

Now in summary, as we have studied, in chapter nine his focus was on Israel’s election. He assured them that God has not forgotten. He has not rejected his chosen people. The promises still belong to Israel, verse four. The Word of God has not failed the promised seed of Abraham, verses six and eight and so forth. And then in chapter 10 his focus was on Israel’s defection. There he explained why most Jews rejected the Messiah and remained in their ignorance and unbelief, why salvation was extended to the Gentile, all of which is a part of God’s plan for Israel ordained by God and predicted by the prophets. And now we come to Romans chapter 11 where his focus will be on Israel’s salvation, verses one and two. God has not rejected his people. Israel has not stumbled so as to fall, verse 11. In other words, to be beyond divine recovery. And there and here in this chapter we will learn that we as Gentile Christians are to humbly and respectfully regard unbelieving Jews with fear, not arrogance, verse 20. And so that, as a consequence, eventually all Israel will be saved, verse 26.

Well, let me give you some history here that is very important, because sometimes people get confused about these covenants, but it is really not that complicated. We know

⁴ Ibid.

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according to Genesis 12 and 15 that God made specific promises to Abraham to his descendants, Israel, his chosen nation. This covenant was an unconditional, unilateral, irreversible, everlasting covenant that contained four elements: one pertaining to the seed, referring to the Messiah that would ultimately come from his loins. Secondly, it was with respect to the land, a specific territory that would be given to this people. Thirdly, that they would become a nation. And, fourthly, that God would bless them and protect all of his posterity.

Now you will recall that in Genesis chapter 15 verses eight through 21 God instructed Abraham to cut certain prescribed animals in half with the two parts opposite each other. Then with Abraham not allowed to participate, but only to be a spectator, the Lord passed between the animals alone symbolizing that the alone had dictated and would fulfill this covenant.

Now some would say, "Well, but what about the Mosaic covenant?"

Well, that was the old covenant law that was bilateral which meant it would involve two groups, God and Israel. It was broken. It was established on tablets of stone. It was mediated through Moses and affirmed by Israel with sacrificial offerings. But the Abrahamic covenant, the promise God made to Abraham and his posterity was unilateral, not bilateral, unilateral meaning it was one sided. And it was established 430 years before the covenant that God made with Moses and the people. The Abrahamic covenant was designed by God to inaugurate his true worship by Israel, one that would be written and renewed on renewed and cleansed hearts. In fact, we know in the New Testament in Luke 22:20 that Jesus initiated this divine contract in the very presence of Israel when he said:

"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."⁵

Now this, of course, speaks back to the new covenant which is another covenant we read about in Jeremiah 31, a covenant that God made with Israel. And that was also an eternal, unconditional covenant based upon God's very character, a covenant that, in essence, says that anyone that puts their faith in our merciful God and knows him, would participate in the spiritual blessings of salvation to be fulfilled both in individuals, but also to Israel as a nation when they will be eventually established, I should say reestablished in their land.

Now 600 years after God made the new covenant through Jeremiah Israel rejected their Messiah as God predicted they would do. In fact, as God had ordained that they would do. And today God is disciplining Israel as a nation. They have been temporarily put aside until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in as we read in verse 25 of chapter 11. And then eventually, according to verse 26:

⁵ Luke 22:20.

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“...all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.’ ‘AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’”⁶

So we must understand that Israel was God’s unique focus of redemption in one dispensation in the Old Testament while the Church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles has been his focus since their rejection of Jesus.

Now ultimately God’s focus will once again return to Israel after the snatching away of the Church in the rapture and then God will pour out his final judgments promised to Israel in Daniel nine, especially verse 24, what is known as Daniel’s 70th week. That is a distinctly Jewish context pertaining to God’s covenants with Israel. That will be the time and many times that we call the tribulation, the seven years of tribulation leading up to Christ’s second coming. It will be a time when Israel enters the time of Jacob’s trouble according to Jeremiah 30 and verse seven. And that, by the way, is described in great detail in Jesus’ revelation chapters six through 19. That will be a period of unprecedented oppression for Israel, but also the context tells us that it will be the time of her restoration when the Messiah King comes and establishes his glorious kingdom.

Then the focus will remain upon Israel during the messianic age, during the millennial reign of Christ when all God’s remaining covenant promises to Israel will be fulfilled literally including the promises of earthly blessings and an earthly messianic kingdom when Israel will finally be safe in her land and the Messiah will reign on Mount Zion in a literal Jerusalem, a magnificent temple that Ezekiel describes in great detail.

Now because Israel rejected her Messiah, the mystery phase of the kingdom was ushered in as the Church became the temporary—underscore that—the temporary replacement of Israel as the new custodians of divine truth. The body of Christ where Jews and Gentiles are describes as heirs together, Ephesians 3:6, sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

But, my friends, I would humbly argue that Israel is never absorbed into the Church. You never see that anywhere in the New Testament unless you try to read into a passage or two that that is what you think. Israel remains distinct from the Church as an ethnic people and as a nation. They still have a prophetic future. And that is what Paul is going to be talking about here in Romans 11.

So the present Church age must be seen as part of the ongoing fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that culminates ultimately in the messianic kingdom. So the Church shares in the promises of Israel, but not in her unique identity as a chosen nation. Israel is

⁶ Romans 11:26-27.

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a magnificent object lesson in how God deals with all mankind. He saves some. He judges others. All to reveal his glory through Christ.

Charles Spurgeon had it right when he said, quote, "I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But, certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this," end quote.

Howard Taylor said, quote, "Superficial logic has continued to argue that there is no more uniqueness for the Jew in physical Israel. Since it is said Christ has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, Ephesians 2:11-18, Israel's election is finished. But this is not the logic of the New Testament. Although there is only one way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile, the New Testament teaches that the Jewish people do still have a unique place in the historical working out of God's redemption of the world in Christ," end quote.

Now over the next three discourses we are going to learn, number one, that Israel's failure is not total. That is what we will look at today, verses one through 10. Next we will look at Israel's failure is not final, verses 11 through 24. And, finally, Israel's failure is not without purpose in verses 25 through 36.

Now before we look closely at the text, you must remember that Paul has gone to great lengths to explain the gospel. But where does this leave his kinsmen the Jews? You will remember in chapter three and verse one he asked the question that he knew they were asking: Well, what advantage has the Jew or what is the benefit of circumcision? In other words, they were saying, you know, being called God's chosen people is... and keeping his law are unable to make us righteous before God, then what advantage is there to being Jewish? They perceived that the gospel was an attack on all of God's promises to Israel as a nation. Are we no longer God's covenant people? Has God abandoned us and now offered salvation to the Gentiles?

So Paul wants them to understand that Israel's failure is not total as we will see. A minority will still believe and be saved and the covenant blessings are still in force. And he is going to prove this in three ways. Number one, by his own conversion; number two, by the elect remnant ; and, number three, by the promise of judicial hardening. That is what we will look at today. And what we learn here will really give great clarity to the mystery of the Jew in our current day.

Have you ever stopped to think about that? How can the most hated people in the history of the earth rise from the ashes of continual pogroms and holocausts and still exist as a people, much less as a nation and a powerful nation? Why is the temple mount in Jerusalem the most disputed piece of real estate in the world? Why does the majority of the world today believe that the dissolution or even the obliteration of Israel as a nation will finally bring world peace?

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The answer, in short, dear friends, is there is a battle going on between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of the Lord Messiah. And Satan knows that as the God of this world, as he is allowed to be right now, if he can destroy the covenant people as he has tried to do all through redemptive history, then he can thwart the covenant promises that God gave to them, promises even with respect to a Messiah, the Lord Jesus that would come and retain his position or, I should say, gain his position that Satan wants to retain. Satan doesn't want this to happen. Satan despises God's purpose for Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Remember Exodus 19:6.

And when Christ returns this purpose is going to be fully realized on a renovated earth when, according to Zechariah 8:3 the Lord says:

“I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.”⁷

My friends, this is not promised to be fulfilled spiritually. How you can read that into this is beyond me, but to be fulfilled literally, physically and all we see happening in the world today points to the literal fulfillment of God's promises to the Church as well as to Israel, literal fulfillment like all of the rest of the prophets.

So Paul wants them to understand that Israel's failure is not total. All of that is by way of introduction. Let's look at the text now. He is going to demonstrate this first by his own conversion, verse one.

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!”⁸

Now let's look at this for a moment. They would naturally think this given his reminder from Isaiah in the previous verse, verse 21, that they were a disobedient and obstinate people and all of the other things that he has been talking about with respect to grace versus the law.

Now it is important to understand that Paul is not asking here: Has God refused to receive his people? For, indeed, he has received them unto himself as a nation long ago, but rather has he rejected, which means to push away, to cast aside. And in the New Testament this verb is always used in the middle voice which simply means that it denotes a thrusting away from one's self. So Paul is literally asking here has God pushed away from himself those he previously received unto himself as his own? But the answer to the question is a resounding no. May it never be. This is the strongest negative in the Greek language.

⁷ Zechariah 8:3.

⁸ Romans 11:1.

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Now we must also bear in mind that the focus of Romans nine, 10 and 11 is not individual Jews or Gentiles for that matter, but Israel as a nation, the corporate body of God's chosen people whom he will not thrust away from himself. If you read the Church into all of this you are going to be totally confused. This is so extremely important in Paul's presentation of the gospel. And here is why. Who wants to put their trust in a God who breaks his promises? Would you want to do that? If God's Word cannot be trusted, then it cannot be true. So this is important to the argument.

As a footnote, I would also humbly argue that replacement theology impugns the character of God. Here is why I would say that. To say that God's original, unconditional promises made to Israel through Abraham were to be fulfilled literally but then they were cancelled due to Israel's sin and now as a nation they have been thrust away, they have been replaced by the Church. All of this calls into question the character of God. According to that position, what was once promised to be fulfilled literally is now supposedly being fulfilled spiritually as if somehow, I guess, we are better than they are.

Given the fact that God ordained—now hear this. Given the fact that God ordained Israel's defection and predicted it in Old Testament prophecy, I would ask: Why would an omniscient, sovereign God make an oath to himself to fulfill a promise to Israel when he knew all along that it would never come to pass, that they were going to reject him and now really all of those things that he promised to be fulfilled literally and physically were really going to be fulfilled spiritually in the Church? Moreover, if that is true, then why is there not one passage in the New Testament that makes that clear? Was God being disingenuous? Was he being deceitful? Well, of course not. Obviously whatever God says is true. Whatever he promises, he will do. His promises never fail. So, verse one:

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!”⁹

Now earlier in chapter nine verse four he introduced this entire section by declaring that it is, quote, it is to:

“...Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises.”¹⁰

He is not referring to the Church here. The Lord has made it abundantly clear that his promises never fail. You will recall at the end of his life Joshua reminded Israel of this very thing in Joshua 23 verse 14. He said:

“Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Romans 9:4.

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spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.”¹¹

And in Solomon’s benediction prayer, the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:56 we read:

“Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant.”¹²

Though Moses his servant? Oh, really? Well, what else would that include? Well, obviously that would include the promises that he gave to Moses in Deuteronomy 30 verses one through six that Israel would experience dispersion because of their disobedience but would one day be saved as a nation and experience a restoration to its land.

Dear Christian, please hear me. If you fail to see God’s faithfulness to Israel to ultimately redeem them as a nation and to establish them, once again, as a purified and glorious kingdom above all others in the world, then you will never understand Bible prophecy. Worse yet, you will subtly call into question the faithfulness, the trustworthiness of God’s character and his Word.

Samuel made it so clear in 1 Samuel 12 verse 22 that despite Israel’s unworthiness and unfaithfulness he says:

“For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.”¹³

Yes, God has temporarily set them aside as a nation until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And then, as he has promised here in Romans 11 verse 26:

“...all Israel will be saved.”¹⁴

By the way, if Israel is the Church that text makes absolutely no sense. Along with her spiritual salvation he will also fulfill his promises to restore the Davidic dynasty and their land, 2 Samuel seven, when David’s greater son the Lord Jesus Christ will ascend the throne and rule on Zion. Ezekiel tells us in chapter 37 verse 28:

¹¹ Joshua 23:14.

¹² 1 Kings 8:56.

¹³ 1 Samuel 12:22.

¹⁴ Romans 11:26.

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“And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”¹⁵

I hardly think that that is being fulfilled today spiritually in the Church. I can't imagine a more obtuse interpretation. It is contrary to reason. And the psalmist affirms the Lord's faithfulness to Israel in Psalm 89 beginning in verse 31 that we read earlier.

If they violate My statutes, And do not keep My commandments, Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful.¹⁶

So God has not rejected his people, has he? May it never be. And he proves this now by virtue of his own conversion. Notice what he says.

“For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”¹⁷

Three very powerful affirmations of his Jewishness. An Israelite who descended from Abraham the most venerated forbearer of their race. And he is of the tribe of Benjamin, the only son of Jacob born in the land of promise, the tribe in whose territory was the holy city of Jerusalem, the only tribe that remained faithful to Judah. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. And his point is if God would save me, obviously he hasn't rejected all of Israel. I am living proof of that. And then he expands his proof, secondly, by including the issue of the elect remnant. Notice verse two.

“God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.”¹⁸

Let's pause here for a moment. You will recall Paul used this term earlier in Romans 8:29 when he said:

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...”¹⁹

And so forth. And that term προγινωσκω (prog-in-ocē'-ko) in the original language, means to choose to select in advance of some other event, to choose beforehand, to select

¹⁵ Ezekiel 37:28.

¹⁶ Psalm 89:31-37.

¹⁷ Romans 11:1.

¹⁸ Romans 11:2.

¹⁹ Romans 8:29.

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in advance. The term foreknowledge, therefore, carries with it the idea of foreordination, of a predetermined plan, not merely the idea of knowing something ahead of time as some want us to believe. Moreover, the Old Testament Hebrew concept of to know means to know intimately like a husband that would know his wife. It means to have a special regard for or to look upon with special concern. That is how the Septuagint translates that Hebrew term. And this is the same word translated chosen in Amos 3:2 where the Lord says to Israel:

““You only have I chosen...”²⁰

In other words, you only have I known among all the families of the earth.

Here is the point, dear friends, God predetermined that he would know Israel as the intimate object of his love making them his chosen people. So, in effect, what Paul is saying here is, “Surely you don’t believe that God would completely and forever cast away those whom he has chosen to set his intimate love upon in eternity past. Surely you don’t believe that.”

Think about them today. Here we have a nation that God is preserving. In fact, I might add that Israel is the only nation that God has foreknown and predetermined to love and preserve, the only nation. And here today we look at the tiny state of Israel, the size of New Jersey, about 5.6 million Jews or so and they are surrounded by 22 Arab countries encompassing five million square miles with 145 million people who are ultimately aligned with the whole Muslim world of over a billion people, an area twice the size of the United States. And yet Israel survives. My friends, it not only survives. It thrives in contrast to their enemies who live in ignorance and poverty, superstition, immorality, violent barbarism and so forth. Furthermore, like no other history or I should say city in the history of the world for 3000 years Jerusalem has been as Zechariah 12:3 tells us, a burdensome stone, an immovable rock for all the nations. Isn’t it amazing? Is that just by coincidence? Of course not. As the Holy Spirit makes it clear to the words of Paul:

“God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.”²¹

Whom he fore loved, whom he foreordained to be the intimate objects of his desire. Since the day God called Abraham there has not been one single day in the history of the world when the earth did not contain a remnant of believing Jews. What greater testimony do we need to prove that Israel’s failure is not total?

Paul continues in verse two.

²⁰ Amos 3:2.

²¹ Romans 11:2.

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“Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ‘Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.’”²²

In other words, woe is me. Jezebel is going to kill me and I am the last believing Jew in all of the earth. Oh, really? Verse four.

“But what is the divine response to him? ‘I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.’”²³

Seven thousand, a number of completion, a number of perfection in the Word of God. And this at a time of national declension. God preserves his remnant and basically says to him in our vernacular, “Cowboy up, son. Get your thumb out of your mouth. Quit your whining. Don’t make your judgments on appearances. Base them upon the truth. Base them upon the fidelity of my covenant promises.”

God has always preserved a remnant for himself. The Babylonian captivity, most of Israel rejected the Lord. But not Daniel, not Ezekiel, not Shadrach, not Meshach, not Abednego, not Mordecai, not Esther. During the ministry of Jesus most all of the Jews rejected him, but not Mary, Joseph, not Zacharias and Elizabeth, not Simeon, not Anna, not the lowly shepherds in Bethlehem, not Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Nathaniel, Matthew, Thomas, James the less, Simon, Judas not Iscariot, not them. And after Jesus ascended there was Paul and Barnabas. In fact, 3000 Jewish believers were added to the Church at Pentecost, another 5000 soon there after. And by the end of all of the events recorded in Acts four, about 20,000 Jewish believers existed in Jerusalem alone. Most all of the early Church was made up of Jewish Christians.

Now only a minority of Jewish people love Christ today. But, again, he is continuing to preserve a remnant. And it is interesting. According to Revelation seven and also chapter 14 during Daniel’s 70th week judgment when the Church is in heaven, God has promised to seal and to protect and to preserve for himself a special remnant of 144,000 Jewish males, 12,000 from each of the tribes to be his very special witnesses on all of the earth to proclaim the gospel in a time of unprecedented judgment upon the world.

What does Paul say here in verse five?

“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.”²⁴

²² Romans 11:2-3.

²³ Romans 11:4.

²⁴ Romans 11:5.

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I must pause here on those last two words. If you don't believe in sovereign election, here is another phrase you need to blot out, gracious choice, εκλογην χαριτος, in the original language. It can be translated election by grace. By the way, if you have been blotting out those passages, most every page of your Bible has got a lot of black ink on it.

My friends, there has never been a man who is saved who is not first chosen by God. We are all debtors to his sovereign grace. Paul understood this. 2 Timothy 1:9 he says:

“[God] has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”²⁵

Literally from before all time began. So God continues to preserve a remnant according to his gracious grace and he adds in verse six:

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”²⁶

You know, Paul is relentless on this, because the Jews refused to understand it. He wants them to understand that if a remnant is to be preserved in Israel it is solely because of the grace of God. And, again, why Israel? Because God has a predetermined purpose for Israel to play in his redemptive plan, to provide to the world a living illustration of his mercy and his grace, his love, to demonstrate it to all of the nations that he alone is God.

I might remind you in Ezekiel chapter 38 and chapter 39 it speaks of a day that is coming when God is going to destroy the armies of Russia and all of the Arab Muslim nations that will be aligned with her and he will do this on the mountains of Israel. Why will he do this? The Lord answers this in Ezekiel 39 verse seven. He says:

“And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel.”²⁷

By the way, not the Church, Israel.

“...and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.”²⁸

But Paul offers one final testimony to prove why Israel's failure is not total and that is by the promise of judicial hardening. He says in verse seven:

²⁵ 2 Timothy 1:9.

²⁶ Romans 11:6.

²⁷ Ezekiel 39:7.

²⁸ Ibid.

Israel's Failure is Not Total

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 11:1-10

Preached on: Sunday, June 17, 2012

“What then?”²⁹

In other words, where do we go in light of all this? God has elected Israel as a nation, but only some. He hasn't elected them all. Why has God done this? Well he answers that. He says:

“That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained.”³⁰

What is it that they were seeking that they hadn't obtained. A righteousness of their own apart from Christ. So he goes on to say:

“...but those who were chosen obtained it.”³¹

There you have the election by grace.

“...but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.”³²

Dear friends, you must understand that God has hardened the hearts of those who first hardened themselves against his gracious offer of righteousness through Christ through faith. That is what he is referring to here even with Israel.

Verse eight. He gives an example.

“...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.’”³³

What a tragedy. People that harden their hearts against the gospel of grace. You know, it is tragic. Some of you within the sound of my voice are doing that right now and if you continue, God will judicially harden your heart.

He concludes this section by quoting David in Psalm 69 where David prays that God will punish his enemies who are also enemies of the Lord. Again, Paul is using this deep conviction that he has about his unbelieving kinsmen that they are not going to escape judgment unless they repent. In verse nine he says:

“And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.’”³⁴

²⁹ Romans 11:7.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Romans 11:8.

³⁴ Romans 11:9.

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Interesting text. The table was considered a place of peace, a place of safety, a place of fellowship and feasting, but unexpectedly the table of Jewish self righteousness and hypocrisy and rejection of grace would become to them a snare, a bait stick that will trap an animal.

Verse 10.

“LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.”³⁵

He is saying here that God will eventually blind those who refuse to see and keep them continually in a state of spiritual bondage where they are constantly trying to keep the law forever stooping under a load of sin that Jesus offered to bear on their behalf, but they reject it. What a tragedy.

Dear friend, I pray that this does not describe you. Jesus said:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”³⁶

Today if you look at many orthodox Jews you will see that they walk stooped over. Now they do this for a reason. It is to express how broken hearted they are because they are without sacrifice, because they do not have a temple. And how sad to think that they have a sacrifice in Jesus.

So Paul has proven that Israel's failure is not total. Now what should we glean from this in the last couple of minutes here this morning? Well, many things. Great theology pertaining to grace and divine judgment and hardening and forgiveness and all of these things. Great in helping us understand Israel, understanding Jewish evangelism. But I want to leave you with one of the most exhilarating of all truths that emerge from the promises that God has made to Israel and, secondarily, to us as the Church. And that is that God, yes, is going to fulfill his covenant promises to Israel which means that, first of all, we must be snatched away as a people, as a Church. The final stages of God's judgment is Daniel's 70th week and that has to do with Israel as a nation. So the Church, I believe, will be taken away in the rapture. That will be the next event on the prophetic time table. That could happen right now. We look around and we see the world being prepared for the antichrist, the world being prepared for one world government, all of the enemies of Israel continue to gather around her just as God has promised. And then after God pours out his wrath upon the nations and even upon Israel and many Gentiles as well as Jews come to Christ he is going to return in all of his glory. And here is what is exciting. Do you realize that we will return with him?

³⁵ Romans 11:10.

³⁶ Matthew 11:28.

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Many people get this confused. You see, in the rapture he comes for his saints and in the second coming he comes with his saints. So when the Lord returns again to establish his glorious kingdom and restore all of those promises to Israel, we are going to have a front row seat, dear friends. Paul has already said this in chapter eight verse 19.

“For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.”³⁷

That is us. This will happen at the second coming when he returns with the raptured saints, the true sons of God that have been separated from the fall. And then we will be fully disclosed in eternal glory. That is why Paul said in Colossians 3:4.

“When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”³⁸

Is that not incredible? Daniel described the glory of the revealed saints as the zbrightness of the expanse of heaven and his being like the stars forever and ever, Daniel 12:3.

Beloved, I will leave you with this. We are citizens of heaven. This earthly life is only a moment when compared to eternity. And if as a believer you are caught up in this present age and you are living your life for yourself, seeking the fleeting pleasures of life, you are living in a fool’s paradise. Do you not realize what God has done for you, what he is doing now and what he is going to do? You spend all of your time piddling around with things that are eternally insignificant, wasting your life. How foolish.

So ask yourself. Am I living for Christ today? Is everything else secondary? Is that the priority of my life? Would I be ashamed if he came to snatch me away right now? Oh, dear Christian, nothing in life matters more than what you do for Christ. Nothing. So examine your heart today. Don’t waste your life pursuing the fleeting pleasures of this world. Instead, do what Paul will ask us to do in Romans 12.

“...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”³⁹

Let’s pray together.

Father, we rejoice in these eternal truths. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will help us to understand them, not for the sake of our intellect, but, Lord, for the sake of our will, that we might be obedient to you, that we might live these truths out so that we can enjoy all that you long to lavish upon us as your people, that you might be praised, that

³⁷ Romans 8:19.

³⁸ Colossians 3:4.

³⁹ Romans 12:1.

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you might be glorified in our lives. And, finally, Lord, I pray for those who really know nothing of Christ. It is so easy for us to say we do given the culture in which we live. But the only way that we can validate the genuineness of saving faith is by looking at the fruit that is in our life. Not just external truth, but the heart attitude, the love for Christ, the love for his Word, a secret devotion to you, a love to commune with you in prayer, the bearing of the fruits of the Spirit and on and on. Lord, for those that know nothing of this, I pray that your Spirit would overwhelm them with conviction that today would be the day they fall on their face and repent and be saved. Thank you for the hope that is ours in Christ for it is in his name that I pray. Amen.

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