

Romans 9... 10... 11

In verses one through twelve Paul describes the present failure of Israel.

The present failure of Israel does not mean that God has no plan or place for the literal, physical descendants of Abraham. He does, and Paul makes this clear right from the start.

Romans 11:1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Even though born-again as a Christian, Paul identifies himself as a descendant of Abraham, an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin. He is not just proclaiming his earthly heritage; he is claiming his eternal inheritance! God made unconditional, national promises to Abraham's literal descendants. He made certain unique promises to the tribe of Benjamin. Paul understands that those promises are still his to one day inherit. God has temporarily set Israel aside but He has not cast them away.

In verses one and two Paul gives two examples to show God has not cast away His people: himself and Elijah.

Paul mentions himself in verse one. He was a Jew who nevertheless knew Jesus Christ as Messiah. If God had cast away Israel, how could you explain the conversion of many Jews? Even though the nation generally had rejected Jesus, there were Jews like Paul who had received Him as Lord.

There may also be a hint of God's future dealings with Israel in Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. The accounts in the Book of Acts of Paul's conversion tell very little that resembles your salvation experience. Paul saw Jesus revealed in glory, was blinded by the light of His glory, and was thrown to the ground. Pastor Warren Wiersbe suggests that,

...[Paul's conversion] is a picture of how the nation of Israel will be saved when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth...The details of Israel's

future restoration and salvation...given in Zechariah 12:10 - 13:1...will be an experience similar to that of [Paul] when he was on his way to Damascus...

Paul mentioned Elijah in verses two through four:

Romans 11:2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,

Romans 11:3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?

Romans 11:4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Elijah prayed against Israel because of her apostasy and sin. They had killed God's prophets and torn down God's altars. Nevertheless God did not cast them away as a nation.

Using himself and Elijah, Paul shows that God always preserves a believing remnant in Israel. The same is true throughout Israel's national history, right up until today:

Romans 11:5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

There is always a remnant of believing Jews. The nation as a whole is under judgment and discipline but there are those individual Jews who have come to trust upon Jesus as Savior. They are saved "according to the election of grace." This is defined for us in verse six:

Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

The Book of Romans teaches that you are saved by grace through faith apart from any works of righteousness. You cannot achieve righteousness, but you can receive it by faith in Jesus. Salvation by grace cannot include works of righteousness of any kind. Works of

righteousness cannot include grace. Those who believe God for their salvation are the elect. Election is based upon grace received by faith.

This is precisely where the nation of Israel as a whole has failed. They attempted to obtain righteousness by works rather than through grace:

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

The majority of the nation of Israel sought righteousness by works and have not obtained it. The elect within the nation of Israel are those individual Jews who have obtained righteousness by grace through faith in Jesus. The majority, having rejected the Lord, were "blinded," or it would be better translated, they were "hardened."

We discussed God's hardening in Romans nine. There God was portrayed as a Potter working with clay. The illustration was taken from the Book of Jeremiah. The Potter molds the clay according to the properties He finds in it. If the clay is workable, He has the freedom to mold it into a glorious vessel of honor. But if the clay itself is hardened, He works with it to harden it all the more. The vast majority of the nation of Israel rejected and still reject the Lord. Their hearts are hardened against their Messiah, so God hardens them all the more:

Romans 11:8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."

Romans 11:9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them.

Romans 11:10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

These verses describe God's discipline upon the nation of Israel for their hardness of heart. Verse eight tells you not to expect national repentance in our day and age. Verse nine is interesting. "Table" is a

reference to the Temple worship and sacrifices. Their Temple worship and sacrifices both became and will become the things described:

- Their Temple worship and sacrifices *did* become a "snare and a trap" in the sense that they preferred the outward form of worship to the personal worship of Jesus Christ.
- Their Temple worship and sacrifices *will* become "a stumbling block and a recompense to them" in the future Great Tribulation. In their zeal to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem, the nation of Israel will enter into a peace treaty with a world leader from Europe. He will be none other than the Antichrist. He will enter their Temple, defile it by declaring that he is God, then brutally persecute them.

Before looking too far into the prophetic future of the nation of Israel, Paul lets you know in verse eleven what God is doing through Israel today:

Romans 11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

God's temporary discipline upon Israel has opened up the message of salvation beyond her borders to all the nations of the world. God is now saving people from every nation. In doing so He hopes to provoke the nation of Israel to jealousy so that individual Jews might desire what the nation as a whole has despised.

Romans 11:12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

Here Paul indicates that God still has a "fullness" in store for Israel, one that will bless the nations of the world even more than her failure. He is looking ahead, past our own time, to the return of Jesus Christ to earth in His Second Coming. He'll take up that topic in verses twenty-five through thirty-six.