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Romans

But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:

**"I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation,
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." Romans 10:19**

From a general statement about the universality of the going forth of the gospel, Paul now speaks only of Israel. "But I say, did Israel not know?" The question for us to consider is, "Did they not know what?" And so we are directed back to verses 16 and 17 -

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The answer to the question then is two-fold. First, it is speaking of the going forth of the gospel, which was then to be heard and accepted. Did Israel not know that the gospel would go forth and thus what the consequences of rejecting it would be? Secondly, it is a question which demands an affirmative answer. "Yes, they knew." And they knew it from their own lawgiver, Moses.

"First Moses says" indicates that the very basis of who they were as a people, the Torah which was received and then passed on to them by Moses, hints at the truth of the situation. In support of this, Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21 -

"They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God;
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.
But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation;
I will move them to anger by a foolish nation."

Israel had provoked the Lord by what is "not God" and therefore, He would provoke them by what is a "no-people." And so it is. The message of Jesus Christ cannot be claimed by a single group of people. No nation has authority over it, nor does (despite frequent claims to the contrary) any single denomination, sect, or cult have authority over it. The gospel is found anywhere and in any person who will honor the true God through Jesus Christ.

Through this no-nation, which is in fact a collective group under a single Headship, God will provoke Israel to jealousy. And he will move them to anger "by a foolish nation." The word "fool" is used in various ways to indicate a lack of understanding, but also one who denies God (see Psalm 14:1) or one that refuses sound instruction or is morally corrupt, such as in the Proverbs. In this context, it is being spoken of as a nation of people who had no revelation or perceptive knowledge of the true God.

From this no-people, completely inferior in the understanding of God, would come Israel's provocation to jealousy and movement to anger. Peter speaks of such a nation in his first epistle -

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" 1 Peter 2:9

The reason for this provocation and movement is obvious. It is not to shame them into condemnation, but to spur them towards salvation. Paul will continue to cite this line of thought concerning Israel's disobedience throughout the coming verses. Then he will show that the intended effect of God will eventually be

realized in Israel. As this hasn't happened to Israel as a nation yet, then it must be (despite preterist claims to the contrary) future to us now.

Israel will behold the splendor of the Lord, call on Him, and become the nation to whom Christ will return some wondrous day in the future.

Life application: Does Israel of today merit God's blessing? No. But God has returned them for His reasons and they are being worked out despite their failing to acknowledge Him. When one fights against Israel, they fight against God's plans for Israel and thus they fight against God. Think that one through and then determine to stand with, support, and pray for Israel.

But Isaiah is very bold and says:

**"I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." Romans 10:20**

"But" is given to contrast the preceding verse. He was speaking of Israel and God's need to provoke them to jealousy and to move them to anger. These actions would be effected by those who were "not a nation" and by a "foolish nation." Unlike Israel, who would reject Him, Paul cites Isaiah 65:1 to show directly from Scripture that in the process of doing this, the gentiles would actually come to find the Lord that the Jews had rejected.

To show the force of this, he says "Isaiah is "very bold" using the Greek word *apolutoma*; a word used only here in the New Testament. It has the intent of someone who dares another. His statement was one which could arouse his readers to anger, but he stated it anyway and he states it with bold confidence. Now, in his citation of Isaiah, Paul switches the order of the verse. In Isaiah it says -

**"I was sought by those who did not ask for Me;
I was found by those who did not seek Me."**

The reason for this change must certainly be the nature of the gospel message. It is given to people who aren't seeking God and they suddenly become aware of who He is; they find Him without having sought Him. When they find Him, He is made manifest to them, even though they didn't ask for Him. This is sure because the term "I was sought" is replaced with "I was made manifest." Also, the term "I was found" was written by Isaiah in the present tense - "I am sought." However, Paul is writing it as a completed action - "I was found."

Isaiah looked forward to the time when the gospel would be given to and accepted by the gentile people. Now Paul shows that the time had arrived. In both cases, from Isaiah and from Paul, this would have been an offensive message to the Jews. But despite this, they both boldly proclaimed the gospel.

Life application: The message of Jesus is offensive. John 14:6 is a statement which shows the harsh reality of rejecting Him. No person can be reconciled to God apart from Him. John 3:18, likewise is offensive - all people are "condemned already." Are you willing to be as bold as Isaiah and proclaim a message which is so unpopular? If so, God will be pleased with your stand. His word takes precedence over the hurt feelings of others.

But to Israel he says:

**"All day long I have stretched out My hands
To a disobedient and contrary people." Romans 10:21**

Paul closes chapter 10 with a quote from Isaiah 65:2. "But" shows the contrast to the preceding verse -

"I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me."

This is the "no-nation" to whom the Lord was made manifest; the gentile people who weren't even a part of the covenant community. In contrast to them Israel is now highlighted. God had "stretched out" His hands "all day long" to them. They had His laws, the temple, the covenant care and protection, and the history which they could look back on as evidence of God's hand of care upon them. And yet they were a "disobedient and contrary people."

Even from the earliest moments after the giving of the law, they were in rebellion against Him. They had seen the miraculous - having been delivered from Egypt by the ten plagues. Then they saw it again in the pillar and the cloud and the parting of the sea. A short time later, they beheld the glory of the Lord at Mount Sinai and they received the law. And yet, during the entire time, they complained. Soon enough, they were in gross violation of the law they were given when they set up and worshipped a golden calf.

And the record of disobedience continues throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Occasionally a good judge or king would come along and set them on a good path, but in short span, they would again turn away from the Lord. "All day long," is a way of saying, "through the duration" or "without ceasing" God "stretched out" His hands to them. This is a term which gives a sense of almost begging. "Please pay heed. Return to Me and I will return to you." Rather than responding, they remained rebellious, disobedient, and contrary to what He expected of them.

This last verse then shows why their rejection came and explains why the message of salvation through Christ was thus turned to, and accepted by, the gentiles as is noted in the previous verses. What was offered as a gift of grace was shunned by the same people who had, for so many centuries shunned Him. Is this the end of the story for Israel then? Did they turn so far from God that they would never again receive His favor? Chapter 11 will continue on with Paul's thoughts on his beloved people; his countrymen according to the flesh.

Life application: God is merciful and longsuffering, but there is a point when He knows it is no longer of use to stretch out His hands to those who turn from Him

or shun Him. And this is certainly true even with saved believers who fail to walk in a manner worthy of His greatness. We need to evaluate our walk with the Lord continuously and ensure that we are living in accord with His precepts.

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. Romans 11:1

Throughout the church age, there have been differing views on the state of the Jewish people. There was an expectancy of the Jews turning to God, but in AD70, the temple was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed. As time went on, it seemed more and more unlikely that Israel would ever be a people again. The land fell in and out of enemy hands, but for the most part, it was a barren wilderness, unsuitable to support life in any real sense. This continued through the 1800's as was well-documented by Mark Twain in the account of his travels, *Innocents Abroad*, which can be read right on-line from numerous sources.

Around the world, the Jews were here and there in little pockets, but they were doing their own thing and no one could have guessed that they would ever reunite as a group of people. The many promises of the Old Testament, which are very specific and certainly "earthly" promises to Israel, were spiritualized and the church was inserted into these passages. The reason for this is obvious - "If this is God's word, and God is truthful, then these things must belong to the church - Israel is a goner." It was believed to be the only obvious conclusion.

But ancient pictures and prophecies clearly showed that Israel the people would be returned to Israel the land. This is seen from Genesis to Malachi and some prophecies, such as in Ezekiel 4, actually pinpoint the dating of this occurrence. In the late 1800s, this became so obvious to Bible scholars, that in advance of Israel's reestablishment, it was understood that it was coming. The 19th century scholar E.W. Bullinger actually noted the number of years until this would come about. The only thing he lacked was what the starting date of his calculation should be.

The world was being prepared, both physically and spiritually, for the return of the people Israel to Israel the land. The Zionist movement, the re-establishment of the ancient language, the events of World War I and World War II, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls - on and on, the miraculous time was at hand. And then, on 14 May 1948 it came - Israel was reestablished. Nineteen years later, on 7 June 1967, Jerusalem once again came under Jewish control.

These things are obvious now, but at Paul's time, and for the next 2000 years, difficult questions were asked. Misunderstanding Romans 11 - although inexcusable from a biblical standpoint, is almost understandable from a historical standpoint. The fact is, few people had access to a Bible and those that did were mostly focused on other things. When the publication of the Bible took off and people really started digging into its contents, suddenly things started to become clear.

Now that Israel is back in the land, one would think that everyone would agree on her role... well, at least everyone who was a Bible believer. But such isn't the case. To this day, one's early training in the issue of Israel will normally stand. If they are taught from the old school mindset, then that is what will be believed. One must actually put aside presuppositions and allow the word to be mixed with the reality around us. Israel is home and it isn't an aberration. God is working towards the fulfillment of all of the promises previously made to them. The world is being prepared for the return of Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom Age.

Paul gives us hints into this in Romans 11. He begins chapter 11 with an obvious question, one based on the closing quotes from chapter 10. "I say then..." is his way of getting us to think through what will be asked. In essence, "If this is so, then what about....?" He is acting as if a defendant in a trial concerning Israel's stubborn rejection of God's provision found in Christ. The question is, "Has God cast away His people?"

"His people" is speaking of Israel. This is obvious from the preceding verses and from the defense he will make in the coming verses. Has God cast them away? The word for "cast" is *apostato*: away (from)/thrust, hence "to thrust away." Has

Israel been pushed out of the biblical scene, never to return? Paul's emphatic answer, "Certainly not!" To support this, he speaks of himself.

"For I also am an Israelite." He is one of the people that he just asked about. Has he been cast away? No. If he is an Israelite and he hasn't been cast away, then Israel hasn't been cast away. One obvious conclusion from this is that Israel isn't the church and Jews are not gentiles. Paul couldn't say the words he is saying, even thus far in Romans 11, if the church had replaced Israel, or if there were no difference between Jew and Gentile.

He is of the physical descent of a physical group of people. Any believer in the church is considered a "spiritual descendant" of Abraham by faith (see Galatians 3). But this concept is never repeated in either Isaac or Jacob. The reason for this is that Abraham's declaration of faith came prior to the mark of circumcision. The circumcision was an outward sign of his already-possessed faith. On the other hand, Isaac and Jacob were circumcised prior to any faith; they were members of the covenant people.

Only after noting that he is an Israelite does he say that he is "of the seed of Abraham." This shows us that he was not only an Israelite by descent, but a true member of the faith. He would be, as termed in Galatians 6:16, of "the Israel of God"; one not only of national descent, but also of faith in God's provision.

After stating his national lineage, and then his spiritual heritage, he returns to the national identity and defines what portion of that group he belongs to - "of the tribe of Benjamin." This is a high honor indeed. Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Further, the tribe was almost annihilated due to a case of disobedience leading to war against them by the other tribes. They were reduced to a mere 600 men (see Judges 20). Members of this tribe also sided with David during his pre-ruling years. They actually supported him in opposition to the king who belonged to their own tribe (see 1 Chronicles 12). These, along with other noted accounts, could be considered a point of boasting.

In the chapter ahead, Paul will continue to speak about the state of national Israel. As stated above, one may need to put aside their presuppositions about Israel in order to understand what God has been doing and what He will do with them in the future. Israel is back home once again and unless this is just a magnificent mistake, then we need to make sure and support them, lest we be found to be fighting against God.

Life application: Diligently study the issue of Israel by diligently studying your Bible. If God has planted them again in their land for His purposes, then be sure to acknowledge that, maybe by witnessing to Jewish people or maybe by some other show of support for what He is doing.