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Romans

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 11:2

Paul continues to explain his emphatic response from verse 1 which answered the question, "Has God cast away His people?" That response was, "Certainly not!" To make sure we understand this, he turns around and rephrases the question as a statement - "God has not cast away His people whom he foreknew."

In using the term "foreknew" he isn't indicating what God has foreseen so much as what God has purposed. God purposed that Israel would be His people. During their times of obedience, they are in His favor and receive His blessings. When disobedient, they receive His wrath and judgment. These are the responsibilities, honors, and consequences of bearing the name Israel - "He struggles with God." When they are right with Him, they struggle with Him for Him. When they are not right with Him, they struggle with Him against Him. But either way, Israel struggles with God.

The name Israel itself is a mystery. It is an honor and a burden at the same time. A detailed evaluation of the name Israel by Abarim sounds quite awry at first, but it does reveal what we see in history and what the Bible continues to reveal concerning them, even into the future. This evaluation is based upon the bestowal of the name at the time of the wrestling match between the unidentified Man and Jacob by the Jabbok River (Genesis 32). This match was a

picture and a pattern of not just Jacob, who is Israel, but a picture and a pattern of Israel, the people descended from Jacob -

"We can not say with certainty what the name Israel is supposed to mean, although it seems to reflect a certain inability of the Almighty God, namely the not being able to defeat a man like Jacob. We can be sure that God doesn't lack the physical strength to eradicate any human being, so we must conclude that the destruction of Jacob would go against the very nature of God. Perhaps the name Israel denotes God's continuous effort to keep Jacob going, even though Jacob continues to fight God."

This insightful evaluation is borne out throughout the rest of Scripture. It would go against the nature of God to destroy the people of Israel; they have been brought under God's covenant protection and have been given eternal promises. Israel's destruction would be a failure of God to uphold these promises; something which is impossible. Though salvation is an individual tenet, the burden of which lies with man, the preservation of national Israel is an eternal grant, the burden of which lies with God.

To support this, Paul returns to the words of Scripture, "Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah...?" Paul's language here indicates that the account of Elijah, which is found in 1 Kings 19:11-18, relates the concept of what he will say. It isn't a complete quote of the account, but a description of it which will include a quote. In his thoughts, he begins with, "...how he pleads with God against Israel..."

The word translated here as "pleads" is the Greek word *entynchanei*. It is used five times in the New Testament. It was seen in Romans 8:26 and will be seen in Hebrews 7:25 -

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

It is a petition on behalf or against a person or party. In the case of Elijah, he was petitioning "against Israel." The reason Paul is going to this account will become evident in the coming verses, but logically, he is preparing the answer to meet a similar petition which he has been addressing, "Has God cast away His people?" He has already answered the question and now will come his defense of the answer.

Life application: Israel - He struggles with God. That struggle is between God and Israel. Our duty is to accept that God can handle it and that He will do so for Israel's continuance and for His glory. Those who fight against Israel are assuming a role which puts them at enmity with His protective plans. This doesn't mean they aren't a part of His overall plans, but that their role is a negative role, even if it is used for His positive purposes (such as chastening Israel to effect repentance). This was seen with the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Both accomplished God's plans for Israel, but both came under God's judgment. Think this one through and then determine to support Israel. God will wake them up as much through your support as He will through the wrath of other nations; witness to the Jews and pray for Israel.

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

This quote is taken from 1 Kings 19:10. However, Paul amends it somewhat to meet his purposes for our instruction. Here is the exact quote of that verse -

"So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'"

Paul leaves out "forsaken Your covenant." It is now the time of the New Covenant. He has been speaking of the Jews whose adherence to the Law of Moses became an end in and of itself (see Romans 10:3, 4).

He also switches the order of "torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets." It's possible that he did this to highlight "prophets" in order to make his point about a remnant remaining (see 11:5). The altar at Elijah's time was where one first went to sacrifice a sin offering. Only after that could a person have fellowship with God. As Jesus is the fulfillment of such sacrifices, the prophet (the one who transmits the message) is thus highlighted. This follows with the theme of Romans 10:14-17.

The term for "torn down" is the Greek *kateskapsan*. It means to "dig down" or "dig under." It is used only two times in the New Testament, the other being Acts 15:16. The altars of the Old Testament were to be made of earth and un-hewn stone (Exodus 20:24-35). In order to destroy such an altar, it would be easiest to dig into or under it and cause it to collapse. This is the reason for Paul's use of this particular word.

The next thing he quotes is Elijah's belief that "I alone am left, and they seek my life." Elijah felt completely alone in his ministry. At a previous point, 100 prophets of the Lord had been kept alive by a man named Obadiah, having kept them safe in a cave. However, it's possible that even they had been killed by the wicked queen, Jezebel. With this occurrence, Elijah thought he was the last of the faithful people of God.

The sad state of despair weighed heavily on him and so he fled to Mount Horeb and there spoke to the Lord about it. The coming verses will continue to show us, however, that God had a faithful remnant then, and He had such at Paul's time as well.

Life application: The Lord's faithful believers have always come under attack. In today's world, it is an on-going occurrence. Daily, many are martyred for their faith, and even in places where Christians are safe to worship, they are coming under increased pressure to be silent about their belief. Pray for those who are facing life and death choices concerning the gospel and also pray for strength to boldly proclaim Christ where you are.

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." Romans 11:4

In response to Elijah concerning his plea against Israel, God returns an answer - not through the strong wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but through a still small voice. And the divine response was - "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal..."

Paul's use of the term "divine response" is the Greek word *chrēmatismos*. This is its only use in the New Testament and is indicating the response itself, not the manner in which it was relayed. The word is spoken - "I have reserved for Myself..." The Hebrew of this verse actually states "I will leave." However, Paul's quote says "I have reserved." The Geneva Bible explains the thought this way -

"He speaks of remnants and reserved people who were chosen from everlasting, and not of remnants that should be chosen afterwards: for they are not chosen, because they were not idolaters: but rather they were not idolaters, because they were chosen and elect."

God foreknew that these would be the elect. He presented Himself to Israel and these are those who accepted the message. The honor belongs to God, not to them; they merely acknowledged His way and all others rejected it. Thus the dishonor belongs to those who rejected it.

Of those reserved, God states He has "seven thousand." The number seven is the number of divine perfection and completeness. Understanding this use of the number in Scripture, it is possible that it is reflective of a complete number and not exactly seven thousand. They are those who make up the fullness of the faithful in the northern ten tribes; all others having apostatized.

Regardless of whether the number is exactly 7000 or a close approximation, it would be miniscule in comparison to the vast number in the land. Truly, only a

remnant were faithful to the Lord. These few souls were those who had "not bowed the knee to Baal." Baal is a word which simply means "master" or "lord" in Hebrew, but it was used as the name of one of the idol-gods of the Phoenicians and Canaanites. Elsewhere, such as in Assyria and Babylonia, the comparable name of Bel was used in the same manner.

To represent Baal, a bull or similar animal like a calf would have been constructed, but Baal was actually referring to the sun, or possibly at times the moon. In Paul's use of this word, he uses a feminine article instead of the masculine which was used in the Greek Old Testament. It's uncertain why he did this, but Vincent's Word Studies offers the following options -

"...some supposing an ellipsis, the image of Baal; others that the deity was conceived as bisexual; others that the feminine article represents the feminine noun ἡ αἰσχύνη shame Heb., bosheth, which was used as a substitute for Baal when this name became odious to the Israelites."

The last seems probable because, as noted above, "baal" otherwise simply means "master" or "lord." In order to show the disgraceful nature of the act, Paul states it in the feminine form.

Life application: Again, it's good to consider that even if the world is slipping into a completely degenerate state, God does have faithful believers set aside for His glory. When we see churches taking down crosses, eliminating certain terms because they may sound offensive, and weakening doctrine in order to increase audience size, we don't need to think all is lost. There are faithful pockets of people still holding on to the truth of the message of the cross.

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

"Even so then..." is Paul's note of comparison between what he has just said and what he will aver concerning his countrymen. As God had reserved for Himself "seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" at Elijah's time, so He "at this present time" has likewise reserved a remnant.

"This present time" is speaking of the time of Paul, but it is certainly inclusive of the entire church age, because his writings are so intended for that purpose - Paul being the "apostle to the gentiles." During this age, God has not failed to retain a portion of Jewish people within the governance of His redemptive workings. This is according to His promises of the Old Testament to them as a nation. The People's New Testament states it this way -

"The idea is that Israel was the elected (chosen people), and out of it God had always preserved a remnant by his grace. The election of individuals is not referred to, but the election of a remnant to represent the race."

As a sort of proof of this, the Jewish convert to Christianity, Zola Levitt, while still alive would travel around the nation speaking to churches about his ministry. At each church, he'd ask "How many of Jewish descent are in the congregation?" The answer normally came back with a small number of hands coming up. Regardless of the denomination, this would be the case. They, representing the Jewish nation, are a testament to God's continued grace upon them as well as the gentiles.

It should be noted that the main reason for the continuance of a remnant is yet future to us now. It is a prophetic acknowledgment that they are still a people and will continue on after the rapture of the church, through the tribulation period, and come out as the people to whom Christ will return when they call Him as a nation. This is evident throughout Scripture, but a good specific reference would be Zechariah 12:6-14.

Until that time, there is this continued "remnant according to the election of grace." This small number in relation to the whole are saved in the same manner

as the vast number of gentiles who have been saved - by grace through faith. The offer has been made and accepted by them and they are included in the number of the redeemed of the Lord.

Life application: The nation of Israel was returned to the land of Israel in 1948. In 1967, Jerusalem again became a possession of the Jewish people. As these changes have taken place, another sort of change has taken place. In 1973, "Jews for Jesus" was founded and the modern Messianic movement among Jewish believers has skyrocketed. As you look at the state of the spiritual rebirth of Israel, note that there is a long way to go. Pray for eyes to be opened and hearts to be changed. Time is marching on and Israel plays a significant role in the present and into the future.

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.

Romans 11:6

Paul has just stated that a remnant of Jews had been reserved "according to the election of grace." The conclusion, because this is written by Paul who is the apostle to the gentiles, is that this must be something that wasn't unique to his time alone, but for the entire time to which his letters apply - meaning the church age. It would be contrary to the nature of his prescriptive writings for this to not be the case, just as it would be contrary to have any portion of his writings suddenly not apply during this dispensation.

The church age prescription for salvation is found in what Paul states in Romans and elsewhere and that is quite clear. For example, Ephesians 2:8, 9 gives it explicitly -

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The doctrine is set and it is unchanging - for Jew or Gentile. God has breathed out His word through Paul for church age instruction. And so, speaking of these Jews who have been reserved, he makes his case. "And if by grace...", meaning the means in which one is saved, then it cannot be based on something other than grace. Personal merit, of any kind, is excluded. This includes adherence to the precepts of the law. There is no merit before God in our salvation in abstaining from pork (1 Corinthians 10), and there is no merit in our salvation in observing the Passover feast or a Sabbath Day (Colossians 2), etc.

The observance of such rituals as a basis for our right-standing with God, all fulfilled by the Lord, is contrary to the nature of what grace is. Because we are saved by grace, "then it is no longer of works." How clear Paul is, and yet we continuously muddy the waters, reinstituting precepts which Christ died to free us from! This must be true, "otherwise grace is no longer grace." But the doctrine is written, the precepts are defined, and the expectancy of our belief in what Christ has done is requested.

The reason is obvious - grace is grace. "But if it is of works, it is no longer grace." We are saved by grace through faith. Anything other than that means that some type of work is involved. If some type of work is involved, then it is no longer grace. Either one is saved or they aren't saved. If they are saved, then what can they add to it? Nothing. And therefore, salvation - both in the immediate and the continuance of it, must be by grace and not the law. It is truly tragic how many people simply dismiss the obvious nature of Paul's words.

But even if grace is grace - both for initial and continued salvation, what does that mean concerning choice? This is as important as understanding what "work" actually is because some will claim that "belief" then is a work. Is this correct? Is one first "regenerated in order to believe" so that belief is grace and not a work? This is a common sentiment and needs to be viewed according to the standard which Paul uses as our example for righteousness - Abraham.

Genesis 15:6 says, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Paul uses this to show us how salvation occurs. He does so

because Abraham was declared righteous prior to the introduction of the law and even prior to the sign of his righteousness, circumcision (see Genesis 17).

This is our New Testament example as given by Paul in Galatians 3 (and confirmed throughout his writings). Because it is, then the process for Abraham must be the same for us. If Abraham was "regenerated in order to believe" then Scripture would clearly - either explicitly or implicitly - show us that this occurred. But it doesn't. At no point in the 1189 chapters of the Bible is this tenet demonstrated. Therefore, it must be an unscriptural tenet which has been invented by man. Belief is not a "work" and therefore God's grace is granted based on our belief.

If belief were a work, and we know that Abraham was declared righteous because of his belief (as Scripture explicitly demonstrates) then the grace bestowed upon Abraham wouldn't have been grace. Instead it would be work. His salvation would have been of works and no longer grace; "otherwise work is no longer work." Stated another way by using the word "belief" in place of "work" the result of Romans 11:6 would be, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of belief; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of belief, it is no longer of grace; otherwise belief is no longer belief." One must re-define the biblical meaning of "belief" in order to come to the conclusion that belief from man's free-will is a work.

Life application: God has granted you free-will to believe. Don't muddy the waters; simply believe that this is true.