
The Prospects of Mercy for Israel #1

Romans 11:1-10

Israel's rejection is neither total (v.1-10) nor is it final (v.11-24). (Moo, *Romans*, p.683). Thus God moves in His electing love to save His people. He places them all on an equal footing of disobedience and damnation (v.25-32). In this way, His glory is ever more illuminated by the marvelous wisdom by which He moves through time and history to gather up His elect into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (v.33-36).

Are we so self-centered (love as making much of us) that we cannot rejoice in the awesome love of God to save others? Is our experience of the love of God primarily in that He makes much of me? So can we quiver with joyous resonance as God makes much of Himself when He highlights His saving love for others? In other words – why do we care about this text when it doesn't seem relevant to us?

The challenge in a text like this is that it does not resonate with us. Some have an academic interest because they think it answers certain eschatological questions. Nor is it that we should love this text and its truths just because – well, because it is the Bible. I confess that it was not until over the years that my heart's bell was rung by this text. I hope that sound will come out in the preaching. So, I call you to–

Love a God so faithful that He will not let His people go.

Adore a God so loving He chooses sinners to save all over the world all through history right up until His appearing.

Acclaim a God whose wisdom and ways are so stunning that they draw out our small, self-centered souls to an enlarged savoring and sharing of such a Savior and Sovereign.

In other words, love your God through this text. It is in the end, about the greatness of His wisdom and ways unfolding in salvation history.

There is a present mercy to Israel so that a remnant is saved by faith.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? (1 Ki 19:10) ³“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” ⁴But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Its Personal Illustration**(v.1)**

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A Troubling Question (v. 1)

Paul's question is meant to express and answer their question. It is not so much an objection that is raised. It is the unspeakable possibility. And if this is true, what does it mean?

Paul's question is carefully worded. Has God rejected His people, meaning Israelites or Jews? This is the clear question that could be drawn from what he has said in Chapters 9 - 10. God has chosen to save Gentiles. So then, God must not have chosen to save Israel. Now remember, they are thinking as a people group and as a nation. Well, it looks like God is not going to save all of those who are Jews or Israelites.

But then notice that he says, "Has God rejected His people?" Is it possible then for God, since He has not chosen to save all Israelites, is it possible then for God someday to not save the Gentiles who have become His people? Is Romans 8 a false promise? Are the Gentile people of God at risk like the Israelites?

A Striking Answer (v. 1)

Paul's answer is simple, clear and effective. No, not ever. God has never and will never reject His people. This leads to what appears to be a contradiction. How can Paul say this when it is evident that God has rejected the nation of Israel?

Paul's answer is based on simple statement that he made earlier. Israel national and ethnic assumptions are not aligned with the promises, prophecies or principles of God's Word.

⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. (Romans 9:6-9, ESV)

Further, Paul has said.

²³in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" ²⁶"And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" (Romans 9:23-26, ESV)

Paul is himself a believing Jew. He is a living illustration that God has not rejected Israel. That is, God has not rejected Jews as a people group. He identifies himself according to his Abrahamic (ethnic) descent and his tribe. He is clearly waving around his Jewish credentials. So, God has not totally rejected the Jews because God has saved

Paul, a Jew. In this way, Paul begins to make a case that the rejection of the Jews is not total and is not final. The rejection of Jews is reversed in a restoration of Jews through salvation. He himself is a case in point.

Therefore, God has not rejected His true people. He has rejected Israel as a nation. He is taking the gospel into the world of Gentiles. But God is saving Jews. And thus, He is saving His people both Jew and Gentile.

Its Historical Parallel

(v.2-4)

What God is doing is not unprecedented.

²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? (1 Ki 19:10) ³“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” ⁴But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

The Guarantee (v. 2)

Where is the guarantee in this verse? It is in the word “foreknew”. God will not cast away those whom He foreknew. Does this mean that God knows something ahead of time? Is some decision on our part what God knows beforehand and therefore, chooses us and will not cast us away? No. The word refers to God’s special love. He foreknew His people because He had loved them. It is never events (like a decision) that is foreknown. It is always people. Paul’s prior use of this word is in Romans 8:28-30.

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God foreknew His people. He called us according to His purpose. He loved us. He pre-ordained that we would become like Christ. Then He set and traversed the trajectory necessary to accomplish that goal. He called us to salvation. He justified us and declared us right before Him based on the life and death of Jesus. He glorified and will glorify us – that is, He will transform us fully and finally granting to us a glorified body in the new creation. Since all of this progression that is sure to take place begins in God’s foreknowledge of His people, then we know for certain that God will not cast away those whom He loves.

The Evidence (v. 3-4)

Paul makes an assertion on which he grounds his own personal illustration and from which he moves into a historical parallel. God has not rejected, thrust away or pushed away His people. No, He saves them. He reserves them to Himself and causes them to bow their knee to Him.

But that remnant may not be a large or visible group. Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19 to show how God had a remnant, even in the dark and evil days when Ahab and Jezebel squatted like toads on the royal throne of David. Elijah, the prophet of God during that day, experienced the great victory on Mount Carmel and fell almost immediately afterward into self-pity and self-destruction. He felt he was all alone. He was the only one who bowed to God. But God had reserved 7,000 men who had not bowed to Baal because they loved and worshipped God.

The current remnant may not be visible or prominent to us, particularly in days of persecution and trouble.

Its Present Certainty

(v.5-6)

⁵So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

The Remnant by Faith (v. 5)

It was just like that in Paul's day. Though it might look like God had rejected and abandoned Israel completely, Paul says that there is a remnant. And it seems that God intends for us to understand there will always be a remnant of believing, saved Jews. How do I know that? The certainty rests in two clear facts.

They were chosen by God. Election then is a basis for confidence, hope and assurance. God's electing purpose keeps hope for His people alive. This means that God has taken the initiative to select and save His people, that is, those whom He loves among the Jews.

God's choice is by grace. It is God's sheer grace that chooses and calls and completes salvation. No one deserves it. No one can earn it. And no one gets it just by being a Jew.

The Remnant by Grace (v. 6)

Why does Paul make this point? Because he wants once again to highlight the grace of God over against works (v.6). If God's choice is according to grace, then it cannot be based on any works – especially any works man does or even a work of faith that God would foresee. Grace and works are mutually exclusive grounds for God's choice in election. If God choose by grace those (in the context, the remnant – the small band of those Jews) who would be saved, then He did not choose based on their works. If he did, then grace is not what the Bible claims it is.

Its Biblical Proof

(v.7-10)

⁷What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." (Is 29:10) ⁹And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling

block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.” (Ps 69:22-23)

The Point He Makes (v. 7)

First there is a summary of what he has shown before (v.7). Israel as a nation failed to get what it wanted, but the elect within were saved as a remnant and the rest were hardened. Here Paul points back to his discussion in Romans 9 using the same language.

The Texts He Quotes (v. 8)

Then he quotes the Scriptures that support his argument (v.8-10). The focus of these quotes is to show that God is the initiator (v.8) and the planner (v.9-10) of their stumbling, their hardening, their present general state of rejection.

Consider the text in Isaiah 29:9-16 as the NLT renders it.

⁹ *Are you amazed and incredulous?*

Don't you believe it?

Then go ahead and be blind.

You are stupid, but not from wine!

You stagger, but not from liquor!

¹⁰ *For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep.*

He has closed the eyes of your prophets and visionaries.

¹¹ All the future events in this vision are like a sealed book to them. When you give it to those who can read, they will say, “We can't read it because it is sealed.” ¹² When you give it to those who cannot read, they will say, “We don't know how to read.”

¹³ And so the Lord says,

“These people say they are mine.

They honor me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me.

And their worship of me

is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.

¹⁴ Because of this, I will once again astound these hypocrites

with amazing wonders.

The wisdom of the wise will pass away,

and the intelligence of the intelligent will disappear.”

¹⁵ *What sorrow awaits those who try to hide their plans from the LORD,
who do their evil deeds in the dark!*

“The LORD can't see us,” they say.

“He doesn't know what's going on!”

¹⁶ *How foolish can you be?*

He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay!

Should the created thing say of the one who made it,

“He didn't make me”?

*Does a jar ever say,
"The potter who made me is stupid"?*

The people's foolishness and hardness were as a result of God's work. He had put them in a coma (v. 10). He had stopped the means by which they heard His Word.

This present hardening is not surprising given Psalm 69. In fact, the stanza just before the one cited points to and was cited by, Jesus on the cross.

Look at what the Psalmist wrote.

¹⁶ Answer my prayers, O LORD,
for your unfailing love is wonderful.
Take care of me,
for your mercy is so plentiful.

¹⁷ Don't hide from your servant;
answer me quickly, for I am in deep trouble!

¹⁸ Come and redeem me;
free me from my enemies.

¹⁹ You know of my shame, scorn, and disgrace.
You see all that my enemies are doing.

²⁰ Their insults have broken my heart,
and I am in despair.

If only one person would show some pity;
if only one would turn and comfort me.

²¹ But instead, they give me poison for food;
they offer me sour wine for my thirst.

²² Let the bountiful table set before them become a snare
and their prosperity become a trap.

²³ Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see,
and make their bodies shake continually.

²⁴ Pour out your fury on them;
consume them with your burning anger.

²⁵ Let their homes become desolate
and their tents be deserted.

²⁶ To the one you have punished, they add insult to injury;
they add to the pain of those you have hurt.

²⁷ Pile their sins up high,
and don't let them go free.

²⁸ Erase their names from the Book of Life;
don't let them be counted among the righteous.

²⁹ I am suffering and in pain.
Rescue me, O God, by your saving power.

They rejected their King so their King rejects them, turning even their good things into the instruments of their destruction.

Thinking Forward

What comes next is one of those texts where there are large redemptive-historical implications. For many, this text is understood through a dispensational lens where the hope and restoration is that of an Old Testament monarchy under Christ and a return to national and ethnic prominence. But, this is not really what it says. Notice that at each major point, it is their salvation, their belief, their inclusion that is in view. The restoration here is that of accepting Jesus Christ as Messiah who has risen from the dead and ascended to take the seat on David's throne and who is moving toward the day when the inauguration of the Kingdom will be brought to its consummation. You see, the fundamental mistake that was being made by the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day and is being made by many today is to locate the promises and prophecies in an earthly land and kingdom. The New Testament writers locate the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies in Christ. It is all gathered up in Him.

Reflect and Respond

God will save His people. He will not abandon them. He grounds this in His unchanging love for them.

The people of God are not a nation nor an ethnic group. Yes, Jewish people have great privileges having descended from Abraham and having the Law and being the family of Christ. But not ever was all Israel as a nation going to be saved. It was always a remnant. It was only those who believed by faith and did not rely on the Law.

The people of God are all who believe and bow to Jesus.

Have you?

Notes