

God Will Never Reject His People

Romans 11:1-10

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Do you ever fear that God might be done with you? You know, just tired of you? Throw in the towel and give up? Ever ponder, *God why, do you still love me? I've made such a mess of things. I've strayed. I've wandered. God, do you still love me?* Or perhaps you are in a desert season spiritually. Everything about your walk with God seems dry, dusty. *God, do you still care for me?* These really ask the very important question, *what sort of God is God?*

Our passage today is a tad long and rather than read all of it at once, I want to take it in sections. Let's remind ourselves of the last verse in Romans 10 describing Israel's unfaithfulness to God: *"But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"* (Romans 10:21 ESV)

You read that and what do you expect to be the conclusion? So, God gave up on them. God is so done with them and moving on to the Gentiles. Right? Wrong. Here's Romans 11: *"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!"* (Romans 11:1)

Has God rejected his people? What people is he talking about? He is still talking about Israel. In case this is all new to you, if you read in Genesis 12 and 22, God promised to Abraham descendants like the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea. God covenanted himself in a special relationship with this one people group. The enduring nature of this relationship is repeated over and over throughout the Old Testament.

- *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth..."* (Amos 3:2)
- *"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."* (Deuteronomy 7:6)

It's easy to see how over the generations the Jews could assume their personal salvation because of their Abrahamic DNA. As I have said previously, my heritage is Dutch and most of the Dutch think that God likes us more and we don't have a single verse of the Bible that says so. How much more an Israelite could assume eternal covenantal blessings apply to them without faith or obedience or without Jesus.

In Romans, Paul threads the needle that the gospel of Christ is for all people AND addressing whether God still loves Israel. Has God simply moved on? Has God rejected Israel? Here's my point today—if God won't move on from a people as stubborn and rebellious as Israel has been, he won't move on from you either.

Paul Himself is Proof That God Still Loves the Jews

"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. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." (Romans 11:1-2)

Paul's answer is the now familiar in Romans, *"By no means!"* The strongest negative the Greek language allows. Paul says it emphatically, *Never! Never! Never!* God will never reject his people. OK, Paul, how do we know?

Paul says, *look at me!* If God doesn't love or save Jews anymore, then Paul himself would be excluded. But he points out his genealogical credentials. *Descendant of Abraham. Member of the tribe of Benjamin.* That would get him into any synagogue or Bar Mitzvah in town. A credentialed Jew AND a follower of Jesus. He says, *I'm proof positive that God hasn't rejected his people.*

"Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" (Romans 11:2-4)

God Always has a Remnant

You may know the story from 1 Kings 18. Elijah has a duel with the Baal prophets at Mt. Carmel. God rains down fire on the water-soaked altar. The Baal prophets are killed. It's a great moment! But immediately, Elijah hears that Queen Jezebel wants to kill him and his faith disappears, and he runs like a frightened child into the wilderness to hide. There God confronts him. Elijah claims he is the only faithful prophet of God left on the planet and now Jezebel wants to kill him. God quickly sets him straight and says that he has 7,000 who have not bowed to Baal. Out of all ethnic Israel at that time there were 7,000 who were truly God's. Paul's commentary: *"So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."* (Romans 11:5)

God always maintains a faithful remnant. Paul draws the analogy from widespread apostasy in Elijah's day to the majority rejection of Jesus in his day. God always has a remnant of which Paul himself is one. Not a majority, but thousands of Jews had received Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. He calls these, *"chosen by grace."* There is that Romans 9 theme again. Elect by God's sovereign grace. Wait, sovereign grace is how Gentiles in the New Testament are saved; does this mean that's how Jews are saved too?

I don't recall if I've mentioned before the one question I really stumbled on at my ordination council examination. When you get ordained, typically there is a council of pastors and theologians who pepper the candidate with questions. I was going along pretty well until someone asked, "How were people in the Old Testament saved?" I don't remember my answer other than remembering it wasn't very convincing. The old pastor waited patiently and replied, *"Did you mean to say Old Testament people were saved the same way as New Testament people?" "Yes, sir. That's what I sure wish I would have said."*

Was the old pastor right? Yes. How do we know? Because of the book of Hebrews and Romans 4, 9, and 11. We mustn't read the Old Testament and think, all these Jews mentioned here are in heaven. Many will be but many, many will not.

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (1 Corinthians 10:1-5, NIV).

Just because you walked through the Red Sea doesn't mean you're going to heaven. Far from it.

This begs the question, who are "his people" in Romans 11 that God will never reject? All Jews? No. All Old Testament Jews? No. Here we have it, *all those chosen by grace*. All Jews chosen by grace just like Gentiles chosen by grace.

"What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as 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.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.'" (Romans 11:7-10 ESV)

The elect Jews obtained it, but the rest were hardened. God is sovereign and we are responsible. These two theological tensions from Romans 9 and 10 continue as we consider the Israelites. Those chosen by grace are the remnant. The remnant is the elect. The non-remnant, non-elect Jews failed to obtain what they were seeking (right standing with God). He quotes Isaiah 29 and Psalm 69 and applies the condemnation to Jews who seek God on the basis of their own righteousness. Eyes that can't see. Ears that can't hear. Very strong language describing the Jewish animus to the gospel. I understand from those who do gospel ministry among practicing Jews to this day, that they are naturally very closed to the gospel. Their hearts are still hard as Paul said so many years ago.

What is the point of all this? God has been faithful to his people Israel by being faithful to a remnant of true Jewish believers. They are children of Abraham by DNA and spiritual children of Abraham by faith. This shows God's enduring love and faithfulness for Israel. Later in this chapter we will discover a prophecy of future resurgence among Jews toward Jesus as their Messiah such that Paul says someday "all Israel will be saved." God is not done with the descendants of Abraham. In fact, we could say, the best days for Israel are yet to come.

Let's return to the question I asked at the beginning, which is a great question to ask no matter where you are in the Bible, *what does this tell me about God?* We learn much here that should greatly encourage us about the character of God, namely, God will never forsake his promises and God will never forsake his people.

God Will Never Forsake His Promises

God made promises in the Old Testament to Israel. Is he fulfilling them through the gospel of Jesus the Messiah? Paul screams yes! Why? Because our God is a promise-keeping God even as Israel have been promise-breakers. This is the test of our integrity, isn't it? It's easy to keep our promises when everyone else is keeping theirs. Business is easier when your associates are truthful and honest. Marriage is easier when your spouse is promise-keeping. Friendship with a promise-keeper is great. But when people are promise-breakers, when people break with us and betray us, that is the real test of our character.

The Old Testament is not a pretty story. It's basically the story of God promise-keeping and Israel promise-breaking. Just glance at the book of Judges as an example. Seven times Israel is unfaithful and cries out to God for help. Each time God is merciful and sends a judge to deliver them only to see Israel once again betray him.

But what about God? Never, ever one time does he fail to fulfil his promise. This brings us to the New Testament and Jesus and the gospel. Who gets the front row seat for the miraculous life of Jesus? Israel. Who are the first to hear that the kingdom of God has come? Israel. Who does the Holy Spirit fall upon at Pentecost? Israelites. What ethnicity are all the apostles? Jewish. Where does the era of the church begin? Jerusalem. No Israelite could ever accuse God of not fulfilling his promise.

If God was utterly faithful to unfaithful Israel, will he not be faithful to us chosen by grace? We are the people of God as much, if not more than, Israel ever was. We are more spiritually privileged than any Old Testament Jew, even Moses himself. Christian, you know Jesus—his humanity through incarnation, his deity through miracles and resurrection, his redemption through atonement on the cross, his person, his work, his character, his story—far more clearly than any Old Testament Jew. And you know the promises of God with greater clarity and fullness through the New Testament.

God's faithfulness to his Old Testament promises should greatly encourage us that he will be true to us no matter what!

God Will Never Forsake His People

This is where the concept of remnant is so precious. God is a promise-keeping God who makes promises to real people. Real people like you and me. He doesn't keep his promises in the theoretical or the abstract, but in the reality of our lives. We can know he will never reject us because his faithfulness and love and glory are forever bound to us. This is true even when it seems that evil is winning on all sides.

So many of the stories we love involve an apparent victory of evil. But wait, there's a remnant, there's a small band of faithful people who have not bowed to the evil king. What about those hobbits carrying the ring of power to Mt. Doom? What about those four children mysteriously arriving at the lamppost of Narnia. What about these few resistance fighters hiding from the First Order? What about Robin Hood and his few merry men? We love these stories partially because we see a little remnant surviving in the apparent victory of evil. A little band, a little group, surviving by the power of Aslan.

Christian, you are living that story now. You are a part of the resistance, the remnant, those who are God's people living by God's promise trusting God to be a promise-keeping God despite the evil all around and the uncertainties of life. Be encouraged! God always has a remnant through which he is exercising his sovereign grace and fulfilling his sovereign will.

"And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us." (Martin Luther, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, 1529) There you have it. God will never forsake his promises and he will never forsake his people. Will God reject his people? Never! Never! Never!

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