

# WHAT SHOULD BE OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE JEWS?

Romans 11

In 1990 when Cathy and I were exploring the possibility of serving here at Grace Community Church, we came down mid-week to visit Ramona. Glae & Jean McDonald were our hosts. They showed us the church campus and drove us around to see the town. They arranged for me to play racketball at the Ramona Fitness Club back when it had racketball courts.

Bobby Groves was my racketball partner, son of one of the elders of Grace. I hadn't played much racketball, but considered myself a pretty good athlete. We played a couple matches and I held my own; I think we split a match apiece. I was thinking I was pretty good. Then we played the third match.

Bobby let loose a serve that was so fast and so low I barely even saw it. It was then I realized he had been playing way down to accommodate me. I don't know if he was late for work or just wanted to get it over with, but I don't think I returned but a serve or two in that final match.

It is easy for us to think we are better than we really are.

We've seen this in our study of Romans. The Jews, to whom God had given the Law, along with the promise of being a great nation and the source of great blessing to others, thought they were better than the Gentiles (2:17-20). The Gentiles who then came to faith began to look down on the Jews who rejected salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul's words in Romans 11 are intended to bring the Gentiles back down to reality. Far from replacing Israel, we Gentiles have become partakers in the spiritual blessings God promised to Israel. Rather than arrogance and pride, the Gentile attitude towards the Jews should be one of humility and honor.

Romans 10 concludes by teaching that God is taking the Gospel directly to the Gentiles because of Israel's stubborn unbelief.

*Romans 10:20-21 (ESV)*

**20** *Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,*

*"I have been found by those who did not seek me;  
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."*

**21** *But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."*

Naturally, some conclude that God is done with Israel. Paul opens Romans 11 with an emphatic declaration that God has not rejected Israel.

## GOD SAVES A REMNANT OF JEWS OUT OF EVERY GENERATION (11:1-6)

*Romans 11:1-6 (ESV)*

**1** *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. 2 God 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? 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." 4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

Paul's point is that even though the vast majority of Jews in his day rejected Jesus as Messiah, God has not rejected the nation of Israel whom He sovereignly chose. In fact, throughout Israel's history, seldom if ever did the majority of the Jewish population follow God; it was always a remnant. Paul, himself, is a member of the Remnant chosen by God for salvation. In every generation God has kept for Himself a Remnant of believing Israelites just as He did in the days of Elijah.

But the other side of the coin is that in every generation God hardens the Jewish majority in their unbelief.

## GOD HARDENS THE MAJORITY OF JEWS IN EACH GENERATION (11:7-10)

*Romans 11:7- (ESV)*

**7** What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, **8** 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."*

**9** And David says,

*"Let their table become a snare and a trap,  
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;  
**10** let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,  
and bend their backs forever."*

In every generation since the crucifixion of Jesus, the majority of Jews have failed to obtain a right standing before God because they try to earn that right standing by keeping the law (9:30-10:4). They reject Jesus and the offer of righteousness based on faith in Him. In every generation since the crucifixion, God has hardened the hearts of the Jewish majority in their unbelief. Keep in mind *they do not want to believe*. The two quotes make clear that those who are hardened first hardened themselves against God.

To summarize, in every generation of Israel since the crucifixion God has chosen and saved a small number of Jews called the *Remnant*. Likewise, in every generation of this dispensation God has hardened the hearts of the *rest* of the Jewish majority in their unbelief.<sup>1</sup>

**Why has God done this?**

**God has done this in order to bring Gentiles to salvation and to provoke Jews to jealousy.**

## GOD IS SAVING GENTILES AND THEN USING GENTILES TO SAVE JEWS (11:11-15)

*Romans 11:11-15 (ESV)*

**11** So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. **12** Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

**13** Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry **14** in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. **15** For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

National Israel's rejection of Jesus has led to the spread of the Gospel among the Gentile nations. Their trespass has led to the salvation of many, many Gentiles the world over. God has an additional purpose in saving Gentiles and that is to provoke Jews to jealousy and thus bring some to salvation.

The way this works is that a believing Gentile comes alongside an unbelieving Jewish person and causes that Jewish person to become jealous because of what that Gentile believer has and what they've become as a follower of Messiah.

<sup>1</sup> Dispensations are separate periods of time in which God dispenses His will in a specific and unique way, based on a covenant upon which a particular dispensation is founded. We are in the dispensation of Grace. Certainly, God was gracious before the Coming of Jesus, but with the coming of Jesus, there was a totally unique display of grace. This is why it is called the Dispensation of Grace. This dispensation extends from Acts 2:1, with the beginning of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, through Revelation 19:21. It covers the entire period of the Church Age, and also includes the seven years of the Great Tribulation. It is based on the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32).

In a survey taken of Jewish believers in this country, it was interesting to note that the majority of them were led to the Lord through Gentile believers. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, who has blessed many of us through his teaching, was raised in Brooklyn. He was led to Christ by a Gentile missionary to the Jewish people named Ruth Wardell. He shares that it was not just her witness that caused him to become a believer, but her life and character. She had something he wanted. She provoked him to jealousy.

In this Dispensation of Grace, God has partially hardened national Israel in order to save Gentiles whom, in turn, God is using to save Jews by provoking them to jealousy. This again proves God is not done with Israel. God will fulfill His covenant promises to Israel. **The saving of Gentiles does not signal a new program. In fact, when we Gentiles get saved we become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings contained in the Abrahamic Covenant.**

**Through the metaphor of an Olive Tree, Paul teaches us that we have become part of what He is doing in fulfilling His promises to Israel.**

THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, WE GENTILES PARTAKE IN THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS GOD PROMISED THE JEWS (11:16-24)

### Even Though Gentiles Are Grafted In, National Israel Retains Her Unique Relationship With God Based On The Abrahamic Covenant (11:16)

*Romans 11:16-24 (ESV)*

**16** *If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

Verse sixteen provides the reason for believing in the future salvation of national Israel. The illustration of the *firstfruit* and the *root* communicate the same idea. The *firstfruit* and the *root* refer to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Abrahamic Covenant. They are *holy* because they were chosen and separated out by God for a purpose. Israel as a nation is the *lump* and the *branches*. The principle is based on Numbers 15:17-21; the holiness of the *firstfruit* and the *root* is passed on to the *lump* and the *branches*. The nation of Israel continues to be holy to the Lord because of the Abrahamic Covenant. Because of the Abrahamic Covenant, national Israel will one day be saved.

**We Gentiles should never lose sight of Israel's special relationship with God. What follows is a warning to Gentiles against arrogance and pride toward Jews. Unfortunately, the very thing about which Paul warns is the very thing committed by Replacement Theology.**

### God Warns Gentiles To Not Be Arrogant Toward The Jews because We've Been Included In Their Spiritual Blessings (11:17-24)

**17** *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, **18** do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. **19** Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." **20** That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. **21** For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. **22** Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. **23** And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. **24** For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.*

God said to Abraham:

*Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)*

**1** *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

As Gentile believers we have been blessed through Abraham. Through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob came Jesus our Jewish Savior. We have been included in the New Covenant God made with Israel. The New Covenant includes the spiritual blessings of forgiveness and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The temptation for Gentiles is to think God is done with Israel. The temptation is to think that because Israel rejected Jesus at His first coming God has rejected Israel and replaced her with Gentiles. This is the heresy of Replacement Theology.

Verses 20-22 are often misinterpreted as teaching that a believer can lose his salvation. This is incorrect. First, Paul is not talking about individual salvation, he is talking in terms of groups – Jews and Gentiles. Second, the branches broken off refer to Jews who reject Jesus as their Messiah. They were never believers in the first place. They were never saved. They didn't lose their salvation because they never had it. Their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah removed them from receiving the spiritual blessings contained in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Paul warns that Gentiles, as a group, can also be broken off from the root and be removed from Jewish spiritual blessings if they stop believing in Jesus for salvation. This is what happens in apostate Christian denominations and churches that deny the deity of Christ and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead or teach a works salvation.

Keep in mind that because we have been included in the spiritual blessings promised the Jews, we should honor and respect the Jews and pray for their salvation.

Far from rejecting Israel, God is going to fulfill His covenant promises to the nation of Israel. What we have discovered in Romans 9-11 is that God is delaying the fulfillment of His promises to national Israel until all the Gentiles He has chosen for salvation in this dispensation have been saved. Then, national Israel will come to faith in Jesus as her Messiah and be saved.

## NATIONAL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED AT THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS (11:25-32)

*Romans 11:25-32 (ESV)*

**25** Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26** And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

*"The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";  
**27** "and this will be my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins."*

**28** As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. **29** For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. **30** For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, **31** so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. **32** For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Gentile salvation does not mean Gentile replacement. God's partial hardening has a shelf life. When the final number of Gentiles to be saved is reached, God will deal with Israel to bring her to faith in Jesus as her Messiah. When verse 26 declares that "all Israel will be saved" it means that all Jews living at that time, will be saved through faith in Messiah. This is the time when national Israel will enter the New Covenant. Notice that the promise of the New Covenant includes the salvation of all Jews at that time.

*Jeremiah 31:31-34 (ESV)*

**31** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. **33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And no longer

*shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

National Israel will be saved because God sovereignly elected them for this destiny. National Israel will be saved because of the integrity of God; the unconditional covenants and promises of God which are the "gifts and the calling" of verse 29 are irrevocable because they were made unconditionally and God keeps His word.

Romans 9-11 has exposed us to some deep truths about our God. Many of us have struggled with the truths of God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. As we've seen, God's Word clearly teaches both but how they work together without contradicting one another is beyond our comprehension. We accept these truths by faith because God's Word is true. May we never be so arrogant as to exalt our reason as the final test of truth. May we never be so arrogant as to insist that God must "make sense" to us before we will believe Him. Such a "god" is not much of a god if I can comprehend him.

Rather, when we encounter these challenging truths let us put our best energies into studying the Scriptures to understand them best we can. Let us hold both truths, Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility, with equal conviction. And for the things we cannot comprehend, let us worship God Who's ways are higher than our ways.

*Romans 11:33-36 (ESV)*

**33** *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

**34** *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*

**35** *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"*

**36** *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

