

I. Context for Romans

- A. Romans was written sometime between 56 and 60 AD, after all Jews had been expelled from Rome from 49-54 AD. Paul was writing to address the friction that was occurring as the Jewish believers attempted to reintegrate with the Gentile believers there.
- B. Paul lays out the truth that all of us – Jew and Gentile – are in the same boat, as far as having sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. But then he thoroughly lays out God’s plans and purposes for Israel and the Gentiles in the Church.

II. Clear Statement: God Has Not Rejected Israel (Rom. 11:1-11)

*“<sup>1</sup>I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I [Paul] myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew...<sup>11</sup>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.”* (Rom. 11:1-2,11)

- A. Paul makes the point that, just as in Elijah’s day, God has preserved for Himself a remnant of the Jewish people – saved by grace, just like us (vv.2-4). They did not all reject Him, and He did not reject them all.
- B. Some make the point that “Israel failed” in their calling as God’s people. But is that a fair statement?

*“What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.”* (Rom. 11:7)

- 1. What is it they were seeking? Right standing with God (righteousness). “The elect obtained it” – there were some throughout the Old Testament who were clued in to the grace of God (i.e. David). But the majority attempted to obtain it through the most obvious means they had: the works of the law.

*“<sup>30</sup>What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.”* (Rom. 9:30-32)

- 2. Galatians 3:22-26 – The law was given as a tutor (NASB), to show us that we cannot achieve righteousness by our own efforts.

*“<sup>22</sup>But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup>Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup>So then, the law was our guardian [“tutor”] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Gal. 3:22-26)*

- a. The law was humanity’s tutor, or guardian, until Jesus came, who justifies us by faith. He is also the one who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, who works in us to both *will* and *do* what pleases Him (Jn. 1:33; Phil. 2:13).
3. Israel failed to attain the righteousness of God in the OT because it was *before* Jesus came to fulfil the Law and baptize us with the Holy Spirit; before the “New Covenant” (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 11:19-20; 36:24-28). If we (Gentiles) had been the people of God prior to Jesus’ first coming, we would have failed, too.

III. Do Not Be Arrogant (Rom. 11:12-24)

- A. “It’s all about the Gentiles” was the thinking that had crept into the Roman church; it’s similar today. Paul seemed to take some direct shots at that way of thinking.
  1. Israel did not stumble so as to make them permanently fall (vv.1,11).
  2. Salvation to the Gentiles is not only about us being brought in to the family of God, but about provoking Israel to jealousy, that they would receive Yeshua (v.11).
  3. Even Paul, “the apostle to the Gentiles”, really had his eye toward the salvation of the Jewish people (vv.13-14).
- B. The Gentile church tends to think we are now first in line, so the Jewish people need us. True, but we forget that we would be exponentially blessed by a strong and vibrant Jewish contingent of the Church:

*“For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15)*

- C. Everything we have in Christ came through God’s relationship to the Jewish people. He did not create a separate means of salvation for us Gentiles but grafted us into the covenant with Israel (Jer. 31, Ezk. 11 and 36). We should be humbly grateful.

*“<sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and **to them belong** the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup>To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” (Rom. 9:4-5)*

*“<sup>17</sup>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, <sup>18</sup>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.” (Rom. 11:17-18)*

- D. When it comes to how Gentiles perceive Israel’s stumbling, it ought to produce the fear of the Lord in us, not a sense of arrogance.

*“<sup>19</sup>Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ <sup>20</sup>That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. **So do not become proud, but fear.** <sup>21</sup>**For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.** <sup>22</sup>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.” (Rom. 11:19-22)*

1. Our salvation is entirely built on the foundation of God’s faithfulness to His promises and covenants. God made an *everlasting* covenant with Abraham, ratifying it with Himself so that it could never be broken (Gen. 15; Gal. 3:17; Heb. 6:13-18). This covenant was not dependent upon Abraham or Israel’s ability to keep their terms of the covenant, but solely upon the faithfulness of God.
2. If God can break His *everlasting* covenant with Abraham and Israel, what makes us so sure that He can’t/won’t break His covenant with us Gentiles?
3. If we truly understood this, every Gentile believer would be earnestly praying for the salvation and restoration of the people of Israel.
4. Remember that it is easier to re-graft a natural branch into the root than it is to graft a wild branch into the same (vv.23-24).

- E. At the heart of our arrogance is a wrong assumption about the motivation behind God’s election. We think it’s a sign of favouritism; we think in terms of comparison and competition. But “when God chooses the one, it’s for the sake of the many” (Marty Shoub). He chose Abraham for the sake of the nations and families of the earth (Gen. 12:3), and has now brought in the Gentiles for the sake of Israel (Rom. 11:11).

IV. Do Not Be Ignorant (Rom. 11:25-32)

*“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited...” (Rom. 11:25, NIV)*

- A. Do not be ignorant of His plans and heart for the Jewish people. He did not discard the people of Israel; Gentiles have not replaced them. If anything, we are inextricably linked to them (vv.25-26).

*“<sup>25</sup>...A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup>And in this way all Israel will be saved...” (Rom. 11:25b-26a)*

1. Fullness – quantity *and* quality? In a similar passage (Eph. 2-4, the mystery of the Gospel/“One New Man”), Paul spoke of us experiencing “the fullness of God”:

*“<sup>17</sup>...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:17b-19)*

*“<sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13)*

2. Whatever exactly it is, it means that whatever our Gentile churches (big or small) are doing to expand the Kingdom – in our communities and in ourselves – it is working toward the salvation of the Jewish people.
- B. Do not be ignorant of what the Old Testament Scriptures say, and *to whom* they were written. We often insert ourselves into those passages (especially the prophets), interpreting them to be about us rather than considering who they were written to.
1. A common practice of replacement theology is to interpret “Zion” or “Jerusalem” as speaking about the Church. Isaiah 2 isn’t talking about the nations coming to the Church for instruction. Isaiah 62 is not talking about the Church becoming popular.
  2. You’ll notice a tendency to cherry-pick the good ones (blessing), and leave the hard ones (warnings, judgments) to apply to Israel. We must be consistent in how we handle both the good and hard passages – “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”.
- C. Similarly, do not be ignorant of New Testament passages that deal with Israel, often regarding the relationship between Jews and Gentiles (One New Man).

*“For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom. 11:29)*

1. Ephesians 4 – often understood in the context of local church, city church, or denominations. But it comes in the flow of Ephesians 2-4, where Paul is unpacking the mystery of the gospel: that Gentiles are now *fellow heirs*, members of the *same body* as the Jewish people (Eph. 3:6).

2. Acts 1:6-8 – some have interpreted this exchange as the disciples asking the completely wrong question (“will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”). But Jesus does not correct them for asking the question, nor ignore the question altogether (as He sometimes did in the gospels) – He only told them that their timing was off. In other words, He gave no indication that the kingdom won’t be restored to Israel.

- D. In the end, it’s the same story for all of us: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and those who are saved are saved by grace, through faith. Israel is the demonstration, the “case in point” for all the earth to see – the ultimate demonstration of His goodness, mercy, covenant faithfulness, and long-suffering. (Rom. 11:32).

V. Conclusion

- A. God’s dealings with the people of Israel, and how He has woven us Gentiles into that story, is a magnificent display of His wisdom and ways. When we grasp it, it leads us into awe and worship!

*“<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? <sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Rom. 11:33-36)*