

Study 13: Romans Chapter 11

Introduction

Paul continues his discussion about the Jews, and in this chapter shows his lament at their lack of repentance, and their non-acceptance of Jesus the Messiah.

Body of the Study

Why would some think that God might have forsaken Israel?

How is it that we are chosen by grace?

What does 'Israel has not obtained what it seeks' mean? (vs 7)

Because What is the example of two trees?

Because they crucified Christ, have they lost all hope?

What is the example of two trees?

What does the goodness and severity of God mean?

How were the Gentiles regarding the Jews?

How will Israel be saved? (11:26)

What do we need to do?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *If there is a parallel between the Jews, and us as Christians (as we discussed in earlier studies), then what are the implications of the Olive tree?*
- *Does God's faithfulness depend upon a future "en masse" conversion of the Jews?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 12 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 13: Chapter 11

Introduction

Paul now draws to a close his arguments, before going on to some general teaching and encouragement for the brethren in the following chapters. He concludes the discussion regarding the Jews, and shows his lament at their lack of repentance, and their non-acceptance of Jesus the Messiah.

Body of the Study

Why would some think that God might have forsaken Israel?

In his usual style, Paul asks the seventh rhetorical question with the same absolute answer as the others that he has posed through the letter – *certainly not!*

He follows the explicit discourse on the Jews, and how they have disobeyed God – a disobedience that was wide spread. As we read, we can clearly see the frustration that God feels towards those who disobey Him.

The most obvious answer to the question of whether God has totally disregarded all of the Jews can be seen merely by looking at Paul himself. He is a Jew, has actively demonstrated his faith, and his standing with God has been demonstrated firstly by his conversion, and also by his apostleship and his obedience to his faith.

However there are other reasons why God would not totally cast out His people. God established a *relationship* with His people – and (some of) the people have responded by *putting themselves into a relationship with God*. Whether we are Gentiles or Jews (or anything else for that matter if that were possible) we enter into that relationship through our faith and obedience.

God *foreknew* His people. They are the *elect*, and are a *chosen* people. How could God who is all-knowing cast away those who have a relationship with Him through faith? Through His foreknowledge, God knows those who are His, and those are not. A just and righteous God will not *throw out the baby with the bathwater!*

Elijah is next presented as an example to support the case (1Kings 19:10-18). The Israelites had married into other nations and had been led astray, including by Ahab (the 7th king of Israel) and his corrupt wife Jezebel. Ahab had embraced the worship of other Gods, including *Baal*. Included in the Baal worship were fertility rites that were performed with the temple (of Baal) prostitutes. The theory went that if the fertility rites were performed, that Baal would bless the earth and make it fertile. Records were kept as to who had been and who hadn't. Elijah refused to embrace Baal worship and would not engage with the rites.

It happened, that Elijah prayed that it might not rain (because of Ahab and the Israelites sin) , and God brought about a drought and a famine (1 kings 17:1-). The Israelites blamed Baal, and looked up the records to see who had not fulfilled their rites. Elijah is blamed for all of the trouble (1 Kings 18:17). He then demonstrates the power of God over the power of Baal with the alter (18:25-40), then prayed to God to bring the rain again.

Ahab and Jezebel were angry, and wanted to hunt down Elijah and kill him, so he fled. He says to God:

"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." (1 Kings 19:10 NIV).

But God responds with an assurance that not all of Israel have rejected Him:

“...Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18 NIV)

The example of Elijah shows that God does not totally abandon His people, and that whilst we may look at Paul as being a great example of an obedient Jew, he was not the only one. God knows those who are His, and they are the ones *who serve Him by faith*.

How is it that we are chosen by grace?

Paul slowly builds his argument to answer this question. We are only saved because of God’s grace. The word translated *grace* (*charis*) is where we get the word *charity* from. We are *charity cases*. We need God’s help. We can’t do it on our own. But where Paul says “...*the election of grace...*” (NKJV) or “...*chosen by grace...*” (NIV) does not mean that God *arbitrarily* does the choosing. We are *elected*, and become *the chosen* when we have the same kind of faith that Abraham had – a living practical faith that put into action what God said.

This does not come in any way because we have earned it – for if that were the case, then it would not be a free gift, but rather it would be salvation by works.

In earlier chapters (3 & 4), Paul contrasted *promise* with *law*, *obedient faith* with *meriting works*, and *grace* with *debt*. Our salvation comes only through the promise of God, because of His grace, and is delivered when through our faith we are obedient to the things He has commanded. We need to note that whilst we have salvation through God’s grace (and only through His grace because we could never earn it), that does mean that we do not need to do anything in order to be saved. There are things (works of salvation) that need to be done before we can be saved – faith, repentance, confession, and baptism – and without them we cannot be saved. These are works of obedience that we do *because of our faith* – in exactly the same way that Abraham *obeyed* God (did the things that God said to do). When we read through Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, we see that in every instance the kind of faith that is talked about is an obedient faith – the people are said to demonstrate their faith by the things that they *did*. We would be kidding ourselves if we thought that by doing these things that “*God owed us*” anything.

What does ‘Israel has not obtained what it seeks’ mean? (vs 7)

Israel were God’s people. The Jews thought that by keeping the Law (of Moses) that they were doing what God wanted and therefore were right with Him. They truly believed that they were His. But in seeking God, they had missed the point. Paul has already discussed this in some detail on several occasions. They were not doing what they did just because it seemed like a good idea at the time – they were convinced that what they were doing was what God wanted.

In missing the point, they did not succeed in what they were trying to achieve. They had become blind to the truth – they couldn’t see the forest for the trees. God had always intended for Jesus to come as the Messiah, but by and large He was rejected by the Jews. They didn’t recognise Him as the Messiah, and they just continued on trying to be justified by doing the things that the Law said. The true relationship with God comes by faith, and the Jews were missing out on that relationship because they were doing what they did by Law. On the other hand, all of God’s elect (including many of the Gentiles) had obtained that relationship with God by their faith.

The Jews had largely reacted to this – they thought that the Gentiles had no place in the things of God. When the Jews did see the Gentiles participating in the church, they turned against them – and against the apostles – and against God. They went out and persecuted and rejected them. There are numerous occasions in the book of Acts (4:1-3; 4:17-18; 5:17-18; 5:28; 6:11; 7:51-52; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 13:44-46; 13:50-51; 14:1-2; 17:5; 17:13; 18:5-6; 22:22; 23:34; 25:7) of the Christians and the apostles being persecuted, and the Jews rejecting God. They were jealous of the acceptance of the Gentiles.

Paul quotes from the prophets (Is 29:10) and David (Ps 69:22-23) which shows that God had foreseen that this was exactly how the Jews would react. They did not *want to know* what God wanted. They had become entrapped in the things of the Law, and it had snared them. Their eyes had become darkened to God's truth.

Because they crucified Christ, have they lost all hope?

Paul asks question 8, and again answers with the same answer: - *certainly not!* He then proceeds to discuss this question. Through their fall – because the Jews had crucified Christ – salvation has come to the Gentiles – in fact not to the Gentiles alone, but to the Jews as well.

God's purpose for the Jews as being the chosen people had been fulfilled in bringing Christ in the flesh, and in demonstrating His relationship with them as His people. Now that Christ has come, then our relationship with Him is available to all. This is not something that the Jews should be upset about, (although they should be sorry for the fact that Jesus was wrongly put to death). They ought to be in a much better position than anyone! The riches that they had as the people of God is still available to them, just as it is now available to the Gentiles.

Even although Paul was a Jew, yet he was the apostle to the Gentiles. He has done all that he can to teach and convert the Jews (11:13-14). In the end, if the Jews were to repent and turn back to God, their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah would bring life, and bring them back from spiritual death.

What is the example of two trees?

Paul again uses the example of firstfruit. We can know what the main harvest will be like by what we see in the firstfruit. Using rhetoric, he uses another example – that if the root of the tree is healthy, then the branches will also be healthy.

Having established these principles, Paul presents an example of two olive trees. One is cultivated, and the other is a wild olive tree. The cultivated tree is the Jews, and the wild olive tree the Gentiles. Some branches of the cultivated tree have been broken off. They were broken off because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. They were replaced by some grafted in branches from the wild olive tree – the Gentiles – who have now become a partaker of the health and wealth of the tree along with those Jews who remained faithful. The energy of the tree – and the thing that holds the tree up, is the root system. In the figure, God is the root system. Paul reminds them that the root system supports them, not them supporting the root system. He is restating the things that he has previously said about the potter and the vessels of clay.

Some of the Gentiles were taking the view that the Jews were denied a place as the people of God so that they (Gentiles) could be grafted in. But that is not the case. Just as the natural branches that did not perform their function were cut out, then God will also remove those grafted in branches that do not perform. [Note, I am NOT saying *performance* in the sense of works, but rather – to use Paul's analogy – in the sense of fruit (Gal5: 22)].

What does the goodness and severity of God mean?

God is rich, and richly blesses the faithful. He blessed the children of Israel in the land. But that is not to say that if we are not blessed, that we are not His children. The church at Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) were in abject poverty, but they were spiritually rich. God is good as He blesses us with every *spiritual* blessing. And sometimes He gives us every physical blessing as well.

But to those who reject God, He will bring retribution – for He is righteous and just. We all deserve whatever punishment God wants to bring, because we have all sinned against Him. God has been so gracious that He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins, and to be punished in our stead. If we reject Jesus, we are rejecting God. Jesus was our sacrifice.

God is like fire. Fire is a good servant, but a poor master. But if we take away the severity of the fire, we take away its goodness. We can use fire to cook our meals, to make our electricity, to make us warm on cold nights, and to clean up overgrown parts of our land. But if the fire burns cold, it doesn't accomplish its purpose. God cannot be righteous and just if He does not bring down the severity of the punishment that is deserved onto those who choose not to avail themselves of God's grace.

How were the Gentiles regarding the Jews?

Paul sees a tendency for the Gentiles to regard the Jews as having been dismissed by God because most of them had rejected Christ. Whilst he has already warned the Jews for their dismissal of the Gentiles, so he warns the Gentiles (11:24) that they could be cut out and fresh natural branches could be grafted in.

How will Israel be saved? (11:26)

He quotes from Isaiah 59:20 and 27:9, where the prophet has spoken regarding God delivering Israel. The deliverance required a change in the way that Jacob lived. He needed to turn away from his ungodliness in order for the Lord to deliver him. Paul (writing by inspiration) says that the prophetic statement was concerning the Jews, and their need for repentance if they were to be delivered by God.

Although the Jews had a love for their forefathers, yet they were opposing the things of God when they opposed the gospel (11:28).

The message that Paul brings is that Christ is the means of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike, forgiveness is the operation that God brings upon those who are His people, and the condition upon which He brings it is our faith.¹

God's plan is irrevocable. His gifts, and His calling (the relationship that the called have with Him) cannot be changed. It has better than a watertight guarantee. The only thing that can destroy it is our lack of faith, and our rejection of His terms.

What do we need to do?

The Gentiles were once outside of God's blessings, but they have now been grafted in by their faith. The Jews who once were God's people have rejected God and have been cut off. They need to be obedient to God and then they will obtain His mercy.

The message is wider than just the Jews and Gentiles of Paul's time. We all need to repent (turn around) from our sins, and accept Jesus as God's Messiah. We need to express our faith in Him, that he is right and just, and that without Him we can do nothing, and we are nothing. And we need to be baptised (immersed in water) into Jesus Christ – to signify in our lives the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Death to our old life of sin, and to rise to walk in newness of life.

RO 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

RO 11:34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

RO 11:35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

RO 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!
Amen. (NIV)

¹ Turner, Robert F: "Reading Romans" p 89.