

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 26, Chapter 11

Perhaps the most perplexing tradition in the history of Christianity to try and understand is why the majority of the Church sincerely believes that God has rejected Israel as His chosen people and replaced them with gentile Christians. From a biblical standpoint Israel is the focus of God's plan of redemption, Old and New Testaments, therefore such a view cannot be supported because just the opposite is stated time and again in no uncertain language. Thus the source of the dysfunction defaults to manmade Christian doctrines, agenda-driven Theology, political considerations, and a healthy helping of anti-Jewish bigotry.

Bigotry and hate is always wrong no matter who it is directed at. Bigotry is sinful because it violates God's fundamental commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. However to harbor a prejudice and even hatred towards the **Jewish** people bears a far greater consequence, temporally and eternally, because God has set this particular people apart from all others in the history of the world as specially loved and protected by Him. Warning after warning God issues to gentiles for treating His people badly; and for trying to take from them what He has given them as a permanent inheritance. Over the centuries that "taking" usually manifested itself in the seizing of Israel's land. But an even worse thievery is when gentile Christians attempt to take the Jew's spiritual heritage away from them; and that is precisely what Replacement Theology (Supersessionism) does.

I've spoken to countless Christian lay people and pastors about Replacement Theology and interestingly I don't think I've ever had anyone own up to it. Many will readily explain that Jews killed Christ, or that the Jews rejected Jesus so God rejected them. That is usually followed up by explaining that the reason the Old Testament is no longer relevant is because it concerns Israel, and Israel is God's people of the past; the New Testament elects the Church and thus God's new people of the present and future. Bottom line: Christians don't hate Israel but Israel has lost their place in salvation history, are worthy of scorn and suspicion, and God has turned His special favor to gentile Christians in this era. Among some, Israel has also lost its right to the Promised Land.

Anyone hearing this that holds such a worldview needs to listen very carefully to Romans 11; and I hope it leads to repentance. But let me be clear; the entire New Testament supports Israel as God's continuing chosen people. So even if Romans 11 didn't exist, any bigotry against the Jewish people or any notion that election as God's own has been transferred to some other people is still refuted within the various books of the New Testament. What makes Romans 11 so important for Judeo-Christianity is that Paul sums up and explains the how and why of God's plan of redemption, which uses the Jews as mightily in their disobedience as He does in their obedience. Thus the overriding message of the Book of Romans (at least up through chapter 11) is stated forcefully and without ambiguity in verse 2: **God has not repudiated his people, whom he chose in advance.** Our proper understanding of this principle of Israel's central role in salvation history is crucial to our faith, and crucial to our

personal destiny on two levels. First; because God continues to keep Israel and the Jewish people as His set-apart people and land, if we (as Believers) set ourselves against them, we set ourselves into direction confrontation with the God of Israel (and it is unthinkable that a Christian would do such a thing). And second, if the Lord's character is that He can categorically deny numerous times that He would ever cast aside His people Israel, but do it anyway, then as Christians all of our hope and security just went down the drain along with the Jews'. It means that we can trust Christ for the moment; but clearly God can change His mind and pull the rug of salvation from under us at any time in the future. Why wouldn't He? According to Christianity He's done it before; what prevents Him from doing it again? Fortunately, none of this is the case; such a slanderous contention is but the result of wrong-minded Christian dogma and gentile bigotry against Jews. Somehow or another Paul saw this coming and tried to warn the gentiles involved to stop and think; and to exam their motives and rationale.

Let's re-read the first several verses of Romans chapter 11 to start our study today.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 11:1 – 12

While in a few minutes we'll back up to the beginning of this chapter I want you to take special notice of verse 11 because it explains the "why?" behind God allowing the Jews to stumble over the Rock, Yeshua (the "why?" of what God chooses to do is only rarely addressed in the Bible). It was by means of the Jews stumbling that the gentiles were delivered (saved). Ironically, however, the "why?" for delivering the gentiles was to provoke Israel to jealousy so that THEY would be saved! So the entire endeavor is rather circular; it starts out as for Israel's benefit, and when Israel shunned it, God used another people who would benefit, but also who would bring the benefit of a saving righteousness in Messiah right to back to Israel and thus achieve God's goal of saving all Israel.

As I was contemplating this mind-numbing reality and its many facets, one thing kept eating at me: the connection between Christians and making Jews jealous escapes me. What, exactly, have Christians done over the centuries since Paul wrote this letter that would make the Jews jealous of us or our faith? What would make Christianity an attractive choice for Jews? Recently I stumbled across something that David Stern wrote in his New Testament Commentary that addressed this exact issue. It is as close to a rant as it is to a level-headed examination of the issue, but it struck a chord deep within me and so I want to share parts of it with you because I cannot possibly match the eloquence or the passion since David Stern is himself a Messianic Jew; a Jew who has (against all odds) accepted his Messiah. I will be quoting so as not to do violence to what he has to say.

"Is there anything about Gentile Christians that would make non-Messianic Jews jealous of them? Throughout most of the last 2,000 years, the Church, to its great shame, not only has not provoked the Jews to jealousy but has engendered repugnance and fear; so that the Jewish people, instead of being drawn to love their Jewish Messiah Yeshua, have usually come to hate or ignore him, remaining convinced that their non-Messianic Judaism or secularism or agnosticism is superior to Christianity".

“If this seems a harsh judgment, then let us hear of which Christians, Jews are expected to be jealous. Of the Christians who trapped Jews in their synagogues and burned them alive....? Of the Christians who forced Jews to hear conversionary sermons against their will and expelled from the country those who did not respond....? Of the Christians who invented the blood libel that Jews murder a Christian child and use his blood in their Passover matzah? Of the Christians who remained silent while 6,000,000 Jews perished in the Holocaust? Of Christians that support Palestinian organizations whose terrorists kill and maim Israeli-Jewish children? Of Greek Orthodox Archbishop Capucci, convicted of gun-running for those same Palestinian terrorist organizations?”

“But the Church’s shame is not only in not having taken a stand consistently repudiating every one of these and other horrors committed against the Jews, but in having actually authorized and encouraged some of them. There is no way of silencing every individual who misuses the name of Messiah, falsely claiming His authority for their evil deeds. But there is a way for a community to withdraw its approval and fellowship from such people and condemn them publicly; instead, through much of its history, the Church did exactly the opposite. Of this Jews are to be jealous?”

“Nevertheless, there is another side. The point is not to cite merciful deeds done for the Jews in Christ’s name, to “balance the ledger”; that is no consolation at all. Rather, it is that Gentile Christians should understand (Paul’s) words to PROVOKE THEM TO JEALOUSY, as a command...or at least as a challenge. Non-Messianic Jews ought to be able to look at saved Gentiles in the Church and see in them such a wonderful change from their former selves, such holy lives, such dignified, godly, peaceful, peace-bringing, honorable, ethical, joyful and humble people, that they become jealous and want for themselves too whatever it is that makes these Gentiles different and special.”

Dr. Stern said much more, but I think this captures the essence and intent quite well. Handing Jews a Christian tract is not peace-loving nor does it make them jealous. Treating Israel and their enemies even-handedly does not make them jealous for Christ. This highlights the great importance of us (whom the Holy Spirit has graciously given the truth and an unexplainable love and concern for the Jewish people) standing up against wrong doctrine in the Church especially as it concerns Israel and Jews. Sadly there are many hearing my voice that has, because of the many wrongs done by the Church that Dr. Stern spoke of, given up calling themselves Christians because of what that name has come to represent. They have in no way given up on Christ; only the organizations that purport to speak for Him and in so doing do great harm to the true Body of Messiah and to God’s purpose to save all Israel.

So what should we do? Folks, silence is the great enemy. It is one thing to be silent, as was Yeshua, when we are being personally persecuted or wronged; it is quite another to be silent at the pain and injustice being done to others. And while it is impossible to speak or act against all injustice and pain in this world because the expanse of it is overwhelming, we can stand up to what is happening before our very eyes; that which is in our own backyards and that which God says to pay special attention. What happens in our own backyards varies greatly community by community; but that which God says to pay special attention does not. We are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and we are to stand with Israel and its people because we are

commanded to do so. They are, and remain, God's people. But we are not only to stand with, but also to stand against. We are to stand against those who support Israel's enemies even if they sincerely believe they are doing the Christian thing when they do so.

One of the best examples of this in our day is the Christ at the Checkpoint ministry in Israel. It is a pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist, Christian ministry supported by some of America's best known pastors; chief among these the highly regarded John Piper of the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. God gives me no choice but to stand against the charter of Christ at the Checkpoint, and against Piper's agenda and the agendas of all those who identify with this ministry that dares to misuse Christ's name in order to defame, slander, and harm Yeshua's own people for the sake of a politically correct, human concept of fairness and mercy for Israel's enemies! At the foundation of this ministry is a common belief that God is done with Israel and that the Church is God's new chosen people. And since Palestinians are gentiles, some Christians, they have at least as much right to the land of Israel as the Jews!

Now that we've discussed the seriousness of what is at stake in our understanding of the place of Israel in modern times, let's return to the top of chapter 11. Paul, in verse 2, leans on the Prophet Elijah to help him prove his point that God did not reject Israel due to their unfaithfulness to Him. Paul picks a passage from 1Kings 19 that speaks of a time when Elijah was on the run from wicked Queen Jezebel. This happens after the Mt. Carmel incident when Elijah had a confrontation with the Ba'al worshippers and many of the Ba'al worshippers (who were loyal to Jezebel) were killed. He fled all the way to **Horev**, the mountain of God...the same mountain where Moses had the Burning Bush experience. In reality, however, he was running from God and the mission that God had given to him as His Prophet. Not surprisingly God finds him and Elijah proceeds to complain how unfaithful and rebellious the Israelites are; so rebellious that they now want to kill Elijah. But God counters that despite the bulk of Israel being unfaithful He has kept for Himself several thousand loyal worshippers. Let's read some of the passage Paul is using.

1Kings 19:8-10 CJB ⁸ He got up, ate and drank, and, on the strength of that meal, traveled forty days and nights until he reached Horev the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. Then the word of ADONAI came to him; he said to him, "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I have been very zealous for ADONAI the God of armies, because the people of Isra'el have abandoned your covenant, broken down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. Now I'm the only one left, and they're coming after me to kill me too."

1Kings 19:13-14 CJB ¹³ When Eliyahu heard it, he covered his face with his cloak, stepped out and stood at the entrance to the cave. Then a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?"

¹⁴ He answered, "I have been very zealous for ADONAI the God of armies; because the people of Isra'el have abandoned your covenant, broken down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. Now I'm the only one left, and they're after me to kill me

too."

1Kings 19:18 CJB ¹⁸ *Still, I will spare seven thousand in Isra'el, every knee that hasn't bent down before Ba'al and every mouth that has not kissed him.*

Paul's words are not an exact quote from this passage in 1Kings, but it is close enough that we know where it came from. The point of it is that Elijah had pretty well decided that he was the only person faithful to God left in Israel; but God responds by saying that He is going to maintain a remnant of Israel who remains properly loyal to Him. When God speaks of 7,000 as the size of the remnant clearly this is a round number and the number 7 is meant as symbolic of being complete and perfect. In the Bible when a multiplier like ten, or a hundred, or a thousand is added to the number 7 it means that God is indicating something of divine influence and importance. Here it means that despite the defection of most of Israel to the pagan worship sponsored by Queen Jezebel, God still has a substantial number of Israelites who remain faithful to Him. The bottom line for Paul is that, yes, as the straw man alleges, Israel has been unfaithful to God (especially by rejecting the Messiah). But just as with Elijah that doesn't mean God is rejecting His chosen nation as a result. God doesn't base His decisions upon the actions of humans; He bases it on His own sovereign will and grace. In fact the maintaining of a remnant is a sort of sign of God's continuing faithfulness to Israel. Thus the remnant of faithful from out of Israel that God saved for Himself during the time of Elijah is to be compared to the remnant of Christ Believers that God has saved for Himself from among Israel of 60 A.D. The number 7,000 is not to indicate that 7,000 is an exact number or even an approximation. It is an open number; a representative number. The actual number of those who bow down before Messiah Yeshua will be the result not of human merit but rather of God's mercy and grace.

Therefore since it is not merit but grace that determines who is and who is not a true seed of Abraham, then self-effort plays no role in who is chosen and who is not. Interestingly we see Paul try to weave his complex and challenging teaching together by essentially using the same question in verse 7 that he asked back in Romans 9:30. In 9:30 & 31 it was: ³⁰ ***So, what are we to say? This: that Gentiles, even though they were not striving for righteousness, have obtained righteousness; but it is a righteousness grounded in trusting!*** ³¹ ***However, Isra'el, even though they kept pursuing a Torah that offers righteousness, did not reach what the Torah offers.***

Here in verse 7 Paul turns the question into a statement: ⁷ ***What follows is that Isra'el has not attained the goal for which she is striving. The ones chosen have obtained it, but the rest have been made stonelike....***

What we can't get around is that once again we have this mysterious paradigm appear, which declares that those who don't decide for Christ do so because on the one hand, because of their own decisions, they have missed the goal of the Law of Moses (to obtain a righteousness based on trust); but on the other hand God caused a divine hardening to occur in them. Once again the principles of free will and predestination collide because they seemingly are opposites and it feels as though we must decide on which one we accept, and which one we reject, as proper doctrine. I will comment just briefly that this rather standard Christian

characterization of free will set in opposition to predestination is an error. I think to turn this issue into a debate over whether it is either human free will or divine predestination that determines human decisions and outcomes is akin to the analogy I drew a few lessons ago that asks us to choose which is more important and impactful to life: food to eat or air to breathe. The reality is that life cannot be sustained without both; each has their critical role to play. And depending on the situation, one may play a more dominant role than the other for a time; yet in the end both are indispensable as both food and air have definite impacts on life (usually simultaneously). In the end the Bible shows us that the human experience is a joint venture between God's predestination and man's free will; it is not an either/or proposition. Where the line is drawn between the two I do not know; and how much influence one has at any given time over the other varies. We do not have to choose between predestination and free will; we just have to be aware of the existence of both and that we have control over one, but not the other.

If this concept bothers you a bit, then good; you were paying attention. Evangelical Christianity as it exists in modern times is the result of Western cultural influence that values democracy and individuality above all else. So it can seem unfair to Westerners that God could offer us a choice and then harden us such that our choice is essentially channeled towards sin, and therefore we fail; and then at some point we pay a penalty for it. In other words, in a certain sense choice can be seen as somewhat of an illusion. But there is good news in all this: however the hardening occurred, even for the hardened that is not God's final word on the matter. Change and redemption are still possible. Why is that? Because whether we are part of the chosen, or part of the hardened, we all come from a place of meriting eternal death. We all come from the same point of sin and need.

^{CSB} Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

The chosen were not better people, or less sinful, than the hardened. The only way out of this dilemma for anyone is God's grace; no action or attempt at "balancing the ledger" on our part matters. God doesn't grade on a curve so His grace is available to all; from the worst of us to the best. But the other side of this coin is that since Paul is specifically talking about the Jewish people at this time (the chosen versus the hardened), then we must come to grips with the reality that it is **because of** the hardened Jews that salvation was even offered to the pagan gentiles. The undeniable inference all throughout Romans is that if (hypothetically) the majority of Jews had accepted Christ instead of rejecting Him, then under what circumstances or when or even **if** salvation would come to gentiles would have been a very different scenario. So Christians even owe the Jews who refused to accept Messiah a debt of gratitude; it is because of their being hardened that God turned to the gentiles in the first place.

I know that what I just told you about what Paul just said may be pretty hard to swallow. Paul was quite aware of how difficult a concept he has asked the Jewish people (and us) to accept (after all, he too is a Jew) so he of course backs it up with Holy Scripture. And before we read each Scripture passage I want you to notice something. The Jews structure the Bible (the **Tanakh**) as consisting of 3 sections: the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets. So it is not by accident that Paul chooses Scripture passages from each one of these 3 sections to prove his case. The first passage is verse 8, and the first part of verse 8 is from the Prophets (Isaiah 29)

while the second part of verse 8 is from the Torah (Deuteronomy 29). The second passage is verse 9 and it is from the Writings (Psalm 69). As has been our custom, let's look at those passages as written in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 29:1-11 CJB

^{CJB} Isaiah 29:1 *Woe to Ari'el [fireplace on God's altar, lion of God]- Ari'el, the city where David encamped! Celebrate the feasts for a few more years, ² but then I will bring trouble to Ari'el. There will be mourning and moaning, as she becomes truly an ari'el for me. ³ I will encamp all around you, besiege you with towers and mount siege-works against you. ⁴ Prostrate, you will speak from the ground; your words will be stifled by the dust; your voice will sound like a ghost in the ground, your words like squeaks in the dust.*

⁵ *But your many foes will become like fine powder, the horde of tyrants like blowing chaff, and it will happen very suddenly. ⁶ You will be visited by ADONAI-Tzva'ot with thunder, earthquakes and loud noises, whirlwinds, tempests, flaming firestorms. ⁷ Then, all the nations fighting Ari'el, every one at war with her, the ramparts around her, the people that trouble her will fade like a dream, like a vision in the night.*

⁸ *It will be like a hungry man dreaming he's eating; but when he wakes up, his stomach is empty; or like a thirsty man dreaming he's drinking; but when he wakes up, he is dry and exhausted- it will be like this for the horde of all nations fighting against Mount Tziyon. ⁹ If you make yourselves stupid, you will stay stupid! If you blind yourselves, you will stay blind! You are drunk, but not from wine; you are staggering, but not from strong liquor.*

¹⁰ *For ADONAI has poured over you a spirit of lethargy; he has closed your eyes (that is, the prophets) and covered your heads (that is, the seers). ¹¹ For you this whole prophetic vision has become like the message in a sealed-up scroll. When one gives it to someone who can read and says, "Please read this," he answers, "I can't, because it's sealed."*

The idea is that what has happened to Israel in not recognizing their Messiah is due to them becoming spiritually insensitive. God has sent His Prophets to tell Israel how to recognize their Messiah, yet God has also given Israel a spirit of spiritual lethargy because of their unfaithfulness. So even though Messiah is right there before their eyes in the Scriptures, they can't see it; they have been blinded to it. Notice that Israel's failure and inability to recognize their Messiah even from the prophecies of their own Prophets and Seers is caused by two things: 1) their own free will in their disobedience, and 2) God's divine hardening of them by sending them a spiritual stupor that won't allow them to see the truth even if they want to. So here we have that mysterious paradigm show up again, this time in Isaiah: human free will versus God's divine intervention that causes us to not be able to choose wisely. And as we see here in Isaiah 29, both causes were involved in Israel becoming blind to God's purposes and to His Messiah. Deuteronomy 29 is essentially more of the same.

^{CJB} Deuteronomy 29:1 *Then Moshe summoned all Isra'el and said to them, "You saw everything ADONAI did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his servants and to all his land; ² the great testings which you saw with your own eyes, and the signs and those great wonders.*

³ *Nevertheless, to this day ADONAI has not given you a heart to understand, eyes to see or ears to hear!*

So on one hand, by their own free will Israel chose to ignore everything God did for them that they personally saw and experienced. On the other hand part of the reason that this was so is because God did not give Israel a heart (a mind) to understand or the ability to discern.

And then in verse 9, we have King David speaking from the past in Psalm 69 when he says: *"Let their dining table become for them a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a punishment. ¹⁰ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can't see, with their backs bent continually."*

For the sake of time we won't go to Psalm 69 and read the surrounding verses so I'll just fill you in on the important points. First of all, the way Paul has quoted this passage is the way it appears in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). So once again we have validation that Paul preferred the use of the Greek Bible as opposed to the original Hebrew version. This would make sense since he is operating in the Diaspora, where the most common language (even among Jews) was Greek. The second point is that Psalm 69 is about the oppression King David is under, whereby his enemies within and without are trying every way possible to kill him. He admits that most of this is his fault because he has been sinful, and in fact the mention of the dining table is because (literally) an attempt to assassinate him by poisoning his food happened. So whoever it was who tried to poison him, David hopes that their own dining table becomes a place of danger, instead of a place of peace and fellowship. The mention of their eyes being darkened means that David hopes that his enemies can't discern, and their backs bent continually means that his enemies might become slaves under forced labor. Paul is interpreting Psalm 69 in the **Remez** method of interpretation; that is, it means what it says on the one hand, but it also contains a deeper underlying meaning on the other. Christians might call this allegory, but it is not quite the same thing.

The foundational point Paul is making is that those Jews who were hardened and became stone-like in their inability to recognize the true goal and intent of The Torah and the reality of the advent of the Messiah Yeshua, is partly their own doing and partly God's doing. So after making essentially the same point from all 3 sections of the Bible, Paul uses his straw man (his imaginary debate opponent) to frame a question in verse 11 that he figures his readers (mostly Jews since the last few chapters have been aimed directly at them) are bound to be thinking. After all; the scathing indictment Paul has issued against non-Believing Jews (the vast majority of Jews, whether they live in the Holy Land or in the Diaspora) is quite damning. The straw man says: ¹¹ *"In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?"*

Paul has just envisioned his second of two possible outcomes (both bad) for the Jewish non-Believers. The first was in the opening verse of this chapter: ^{CJB} **Romans 11:1** *"In that case, I*

say, isn't it that God has repudiated his people?" What is being implied here is a direct action of God to reject His people for their lack of faith by rejecting His Son Yeshua. But now in verse 11 (¹¹ **"In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?"**) it is NOT God taking action. Rather it is that the people have themselves fallen away from God's mercy as a natural consequence of refusing to accept their Messiah. In both cases Paul gives his typical rabbinic answer: "Heaven forbid". So Paul is saying to his straw man: there is no circumstance that you can think of whereby God's chosen people are rejected and abandoned, even if by all human standards they deserve to be. Mostly this is because God elected them long before they were ever a people, and since the election is in the form of a divine promise, such an election is not revocable for any reason.

And now we come full circle, back to where we started today. Verse 11 in its entirety says: ¹¹ **"In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?" Heaven forbid! Quite the contrary, it is by means of their stumbling that the deliverance has come to the Gentiles, in order to provoke them to jealousy.** After refuting in every way possible the notion that those Jews (the hardened, stone-like ones) who have rejected Yeshua, have also been rejected by The Father, or because they stumbled they are permanently spiritually disabled without the possibility of redemption, Paul explains why it works this way. It is all part of God's plan and it came from His foreknowledge. It was by means of those Jews who refused God's mercy that God first turned His attention to the gentiles. But God delivered the gentiles for a purpose; the purpose for the gentiles (meaning gentile Believers) is to cause the hardened Jews to become jealous and want what the Believing gentiles have: a saving righteousness through Messiah. A righteousness not earned, but rather freely given. A righteousness that comes by trust, and not by works and deeds. Bottom line: these non-Believing Jews are not excluded forever (whether at His doing or their own) and God has a plan to get them back in His favor. And that plan is the gentiles.

Quite amazingly Israel's great sin is really just the beginning of a great process that began 2000 years before Paul was born; in the end it brings blessing back to Israel. And in the middle of the process lies the gentiles.....who also get blessed! As unfathomable as it may seem, it is BECAUSE of Israel's rebellion and unfaithfulness that salvation has come for gentiles. And it is BECAUSE of the salvation of gentiles that God's original target, His chosen people Israel, will be saved.

Why this strange convoluted pathway to redemption and restoration? Why take this route; dangerous, full of detours and littered with potholes? Because there was a promise made two millennia earlier that God fully intended to fulfill because He always keeps His promises:

Genesis 12:1-3 CJB

^{CJB} **Genesis 12:1 Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you.**

² **I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and**

you are to be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

We'll continue in Romans 11 next time.