

Mercy  
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## Romans 11

Today's text addresses the question: When Christ returns, what are God's plans for His chosen people, the nation of Israel? It's a subject that is much debated among Bible scholars. Though Israel has rejected Christ as Messiah, will He one day restore the nation as the geographic centerpiece of Christ's future earthly reign? Has the church replaced Israel? What is replacement theology? What is a premillennial dispensationalist?

This is one of those texts that causes the teacher to imagine the students saying, "So what?" "Why do I need to know God's plans for the nation of Israel if I'm not Jewish?" "If I'm a follower Christ, why does this matter to me?" "It's eight a.m. on a Sunday and I'm sleepy. Can't we just skip Romans 11?"

I admit I had that thought about skipping chapter 11 and just doing two weeks on chapter 12. Then again, I wouldn't do that. God put Romans 11 in our path for a reason, and while we can't unravel everything about it, He wants us to know about the significance of the nation of Israel in His plan of salvation.

So, get another cup of coffee – make it caffeinated – and let me tell you how I plan to approach this quick study of Romans 11 and understanding God's ultimate plan for the nation of Israel. Looking at this text we will ask:

What do we know for sure? What do we admit we don't know? What does scripture tell us we all NEED to know?

Big Idea: God's offer of salvation is to all people, Jews and Gentiles. Followers of Christ should have an appreciation for the role of God's chosen people Israel in His plan of salvation for all.

- Paul sets the tone of this section of his letter with two rhetorical questions.

- In Romans 11:1 he asks then answers, “I ask, then, has God rejected his own people, the nation of Israel? Of course not!”<sup>i</sup> [Pretty definitive!]
- In 11:11 he asks and answers, “<sup>11</sup> Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not!”<sup>ii</sup> [Again, a firm answer]
- Under the heading of “what we know for sure,” I believe those verses show that God has not cast aside His chosen people the nation of Israel in His plan of salvation. Some would argue that Israel here means the church (saved). Why didn’t Paul say that? More on that in a moment.
- First, let’s talk about what we can all agree on regarding Israel.
- The Old Testament tells us Israel is God’s chosen nation.
- Genesis 12:3 (NLT) God said to Abram, <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”
- In Zechariah 2:8 (NLT) God said to Israel, “Anyone who harms you harms my most precious possession.” “...the apple of His eye.”
- Deuteronomy 7:6 (NLT) <sup>6</sup> For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.
- Therefore we KNOW that the nation of Israel is God’s chosen people.
- We know that Jesus came to us from Israel. (Heb. 7:14)
- We know Israel gave us the twelve apostles and our Bible!
- Jesus said, “...salvation comes through the Jews.” John 4:22 (NLT)
- Psalm 122:6 tells me to “Pray for peace in Jerusalem.”
- It’s clear that followers of Christ should have a love for the nation of Israel, yet historically, that often hasn’t been the case.
- Ray Stedman writes, “*Unfortunately, the church and Israel are often like two relatives who can't get along with each other. Through the centuries, disagreement and outright persecution and unhappy situations have prevailed. But Chapter 11 of Romans gives us some very helpful insights into how to live with our Jewish friends and neighbors.*”<sup>iii</sup>

- Another thing we know is that as a nation Israel rejected Christ as Messiah. Look at Romans 11:7 & 8:

Romans 11:7–8 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> So this is the situation: Most of the people of Israel have not found the favor of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen—but the hearts of the rest were hardened. <sup>8</sup> As the Scriptures say,

“God has put them into a deep sleep. To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see, and closed their ears so they do not hear.”

- Most of Israel has “not found the favor of God they are looking for so earnestly.” They were trying to work to earn salvation.
- Paul said some Israelites (a remnant) “the ones God has chosen” (the elect) accepted Christ by grace and through faith.
- Verse six says their salvation was “through God’s kindness...not by their good works.” It speaks of grace that is “free and undeserved.”
- Another thing we know: salvation is by grace through faith and not works!
- Now we’re beginning to get a peek into what we don’t know.
- Verse eight says, a remnant was saved but the rest were put into a spiritual deep sleep so they do not see and do not hear the message of the gospel.
- This can be hard to grasp. Why would God in His sovereignty harden the hearts of His chosen people?
- Hebrews 3:8–11 (to Hebrews) (NLT) <sup>8</sup> don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled... <sup>10</sup> So I was angry with them, and I said, ‘Their hearts always turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.’ <sup>11</sup> So in my anger I took an oath: ‘They will never enter my place of rest.’ ”
- Another thing we know for sure: Continually rejecting God’s offer of salvation, results in hardened hearts and minds blind to the gospel.
- This sounds like bad news! God uses bad news to bring about good news. In this case it’s good news for both Jews and Gentiles in his plan:

Romans 11:11 (NLT)

<sup>11</sup> Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves.

Romans 11:14–15 (NLT)

<sup>14</sup> for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead!

- The good news for Gentiles: God made salvation available to all.
- The good news for the people of Israel: there is still hope for them to accept the truth of the gospel.
- The interesting news: God wants us Gentiles to be so joyous in our salvation that the people of Israel want to get in on it!
- On the other hand, you Gentiles, don't get too smug about salvation.
- Beginning in verse 17, Paul uses the example of an olive tree to illustrate how God has "grafted in" the "wild olive branches" (Gentiles) into the real, cultivated olive tree (Abraham's "tree" Israel.)

Romans 11:18 (NLT)

<sup>18</sup> But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

Romans 11:20 (NLT)

<sup>20</sup> ...remember—those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.

Romans 11:22 (ESV)

<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.

- A saved Gentile should not have an arrogant, smug attitude toward ANY unsaved person and especially not toward God's chosen nation Israel.

- We should live in humility that God, through Israel, brought us salvation by His grace and through faith in Christ.
- Verse 22 is a balanced view of God. We tend to only want to think about His kindness, but a just God also has severity for those who reject Him. This is another reason to be humble and not smug about our salvation. We've been spared His severity and if we've truly been saved we will "continue in his kindness" becoming more like Christ (sanctification.)

- Here's the good news for Israel:

Romans 11:23 (NLT) <sup>23</sup> And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree.

- Again, we see God's sovereign plan is at work:

Romans 11:25–27 (NLT)

<sup>25</sup> I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. <sup>26</sup> And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, "The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.

<sup>27</sup> And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins."

- At some point in history the "full number" of Gentiles will come to Christ and God's temporary "hardening" of Israel's hearts will come to an end.
- What we know is God has a plan for "all Israel" to be saved (verse 26.)
- What we don't know is exactly what that means. Theologians argue about the meaning of "all Israel." Some believe it speaks to only those who are the "elect" in the nation of Israel who will turn to Christ when He returns.
- Others believe that indeed after the tribulation, all Israel will turn to Christ.
- They point to scripture like Zechariah 12:10 (NLT) <sup>10</sup> "Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they

have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.

- We can't get too theologically deep in this lesson, but I DO want you to be aware that there are different schools of thought on Israel's role and how God will fulfill His covenant with them.

Two of them are:

- Pre-millennial Dispensationalism – (Popular in the evangelical church) Dispensational premillennialists hold that the nation of Israel will be saved and restored to a place of preeminence in the millennium. Thus, Israel will have a special function of service in the millennium that is different from that of the Church.
- Replacement Theology (Supersessionism) – The church (saved people) has replaced Israel as the new Israel.<sup>iv</sup>
- I personally believe scripture makes it plain God has a plan for the nation of Israel when Christ comes back to earth as King of Kings.
- I'm not theologically trained, just a layman who loves Jesus and His word but I see a great promise for all of us in Romans 11:28–29 (NLT) <sup>28</sup> Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the Good News, and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>29</sup> For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.
- That has implications not only for Israel but also for all of us. God doesn't walk away from His promises even when we are disobedient.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- This chapter has again proven to me that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus and not because of anything we can do to earn it.
- No one can boast in our ethnicity, our denomination, or background when it comes to salvation. We can only boast in Jesus and the grace of God.
- We also see that the nation of Israel should be important to us if we are followers of Christ. Romans 1:16 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation

to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Salvation came through Israel)

- What I do know: I'm convinced God wants me to love Israel as a nation and all Jewish people as citizens and descendants of that nation.
- There is no place for anti-Semitism among followers of Christ.
- Does God have a plan for the nation of Israel when Jesus returns?
- No doubt in my mind, He does! What I don't know is exactly how God will orchestrate all of this.
- Here is why I'm not staying up nights worrying about figuring it out. This is what I believe we all NEED to know:

Romans 11:33–36 (NLT)

<sup>33</sup> Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

<sup>34</sup> For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? <sup>35</sup> And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back?

<sup>36</sup> For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.

- God has a plan for Israel just as He has a plan for me. My job is to trust Him and His sovereignty as I strive to be more like Christ in the meantime.

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<sup>i</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ro 11:1).

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ro 11:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/romans/theres-hope-ahead>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensational-premillennialism.html>