



That hymn personalizes the gospel. “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” God’s forgiveness is based solely on the sacrifice of his Son, who died on the cross for our sins and was raised on the third day, just as the Scripture said. Jesus now sits in the place of supreme majesty where he graciously offers the gift of salvation to all. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). This is good news for all who will repent and trust in Jesus alone to save them. This is the theme of Romans 10 and really the whole Bible.

Yet sadly, many who hear the good news of salvation don’t *believe* it. They think their good works puts them on good terms with God. That’s what Israel thought. Instead of trusting Jesus to save them, they tried to pursue their own righteousness by keeping the Law. Since Israel rejected Christ, had God rejected Israel? That is the opening question of Romans 11. Look with me at Romans 11:1-10 (p. 890):

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. 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.” ⁴But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵So 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.

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.”

- Romans 11:1-10

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God’s holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Perhaps you read a text like this and wonder how it's relevant to your life. What does it have to do with the issues you're facing, like finding a wife or husband, or being happy with the one you've got? What does Israel's past have to do with the challenges of parenting or paying the bills or resolving conflict or working through your own personal problems or health issues?

Those are fair questions but let me share a few reasons why Romans 11 is relevant to you, and why you shouldn't check out mentally until chapter 12.

1. The main issue being addressed in this section of Romans is, "Can God's promises fail?" Because if God has rejected his people, then that means that God has reneged on the promise he made to them.

This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will I reject all of Israel's descendants because of all they have done – this is the Lord's declaration."

- Jeremiah 31:37

If God cannot or will not keep his promises to Israel, then how can we be sure that God will keep his promises to us? That's a relevant issue!

2. On a broader scale, we watch the news, and the world seems to be getting worse by the minute: the war in Ukraine, rising inflation, human trafficking, the opioid epidemic, transgender advocates imposing their ideology on school children – the list goes on and on. At times we may wonder what God is doing and if he is really in charge. Yet Romans 11 assures us that he is, and his word does not fail.
3. Romans 11 also teaches us how we should regard the Jewish people. Some Christians are so pro-Israel, that the nation can do no wrong in their eyes. Yet other Christians, sadly, are anti-Semitic. Even the great Reformer Martin Luther was guilty of this. He believed that God had deserted the Jews, so it was okay for Christians to ignore them. But later in life, Luther went a step further, recommending that harsh measures be taken against the Jews, such as burning their schools and synagogues, confiscating their literature, forbidding rabbis to teach, on pain of death. Shortly before his death, Luther said, "We are at fault for not slaying them." Centuries later, the Nazis used Luther's writings to support their atrocities against the Jews.¹ But Romans 11 shows us that we should love the Jews and long for them to be saved, knowing that God is not done with them.

¹ Eric W. Gritsch, "Was Luther Anti-Semitic?" Christianity Today [online]. Retrieved on 31 March 2022 at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-39/was-luther-anti-semitic.html>.

In Romans 11, Paul shows that God's rejection of Israel is partial, not total. It's temporary, not permanent.² Specifically, verses 1-10 teach us:

***God has not rejected his people,
"a remnant chosen by grace."***

Courtney Doctor, the keynote speaker for our women's conference, showed how the Bible reveals the grand mission of God to redeem his rebellious and wayward children, and he will stop at nothing until his mission is accomplished. In Romans 11 Paul affirms the faithfulness of God by appealing first to his own experience.

1. Always a remnant (vv. 1-5a)

Paul begins chapter 11 by saying, "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" (v. 1). Paul was a Jew through and through. He had even been born into the tribe of Benjamin from which came Israel's first king – Saul. Acts 13:9 describes the apostle as "Saul, who was also called Paul." Saul was his Jewish name. Paul was his Roman name. The Lord miraculously saved Paul on the road to Damascus, where he was headed to persecute more Christians. When the Lord told Ananias to go see Paul, Ananias got nervous and said,

"But Lord, I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel."

- Acts 9:13-15 MSG

Paul was living proof that "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (v. 2a). This statement closely resembles the words of Psalm 94:14, which says, "For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance" (NLT).

The psalmist said, "the Lord will not reject his people," and Paul says, "God has not rejected his people." Similarly, the prophet Samuel declared,

"For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself."

- 1 Samuel 12:22

This statement was part of Samuel's farewell address to the people of Israel, who had rejected the theocratic rule of God by asking for a king who would reign over them like the kings of other nations. In his farewell address, Samuel recounts the sins of Israel but also reassures them that God will not forsake them. Similarly,

² Steven J. Cole, *Can God's Promises Fail? (Romans 11:1-6)*, copyright 2012. Retrieved on 31 March 2022 from <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-67-can-god-s-promises-fail-romans-11-6>.

the people of Israel in Paul's day had sinned by rejecting Jesus the Messiah. Nevertheless, God has not forsaken his people.³

In verses 2-4, Paul offers additional proof that God has not forsaken his people:

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.” ⁴But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

Things were not as hopeless as Elijah thought. Elijah thought he was the only one left serving God, when actually there were 7,000 men who had not bowed to Baal – 7,000 men who were faithful to God because God kept them for himself.

It's worth noting that Elijah cried, “I alone am left” after he left his servant behind (1 Kings 19:3, 10). Daniel Doriani writes, “Like Elijah, we sometimes feel alone ... because we have isolated ourselves.” That's easy to do when we're depressed, and it seems that everything is against us. But God showed Elijah, and the Lord shows that “no one who does God's work is truly alone.”⁴ Don't isolate yourself. Insulate yourself with other believers. The best place to do this is the local church.

God always has a faithful remnant that he has kept for himself. “God never leaves himself without a witness”⁵ – even in the darkest of times. “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom. 11:5). Remember that when you watch the news and everything seems doom and gloom. Check these statistics from the 2022 Status of Global Christianity report:⁶

In 1900, more than half the world's population (54.3%) was unevangelized. That has now fallen to 28%.

This year, 93 million copies of God's Word will be printed, up from 54 million in 2000 and 5 million in 1900.

Christianity is growing faster in Africa than any other place in the world, and more Christians live in Africa than any other continent.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, second edition. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), p. 565.

⁴ Daniel M. Doriani, *Romans*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), p. 382. Doriani rehearses how the Lord cared for Elijah. Doriani then suggests, “When caring for the forlorn, we can attend to physical needs, question despairing remarks, assign work, and offer presence” (p. 383).

⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, edited by Art Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 1724.

⁶ Aaron Earls, “7 Encouraging Trends of Global Christianity in 2022,” Lifeway Research, 31 January 2022 [online]. Retrieved on 1 April 2022 from <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/01/31/7-encouraging-trends-of-global-christianity-in-2022/>.

The Lord is building his church – which includes a remnant of Jews! Today there are 10,000-15,000 Messianic Jews in Israel, about 200,000 in the United States,⁷ and about 350,000 worldwide.⁸ *There’s always a remnant!*

2. All of grace (vv. 5b-6a)

“So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Rom. 11:5-6). Four times in these two verses, Paul mentions the word “grace.” “Grace is God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.”⁹

The only reason that some Jews – or anyone else – believes is because God has graciously chosen them to be part of his people (cf. 9:27-29). Some may think it’s unfair of God to choose some and not others. But if that were true, then election would not really be of grace. Yet that is the very point Paul is emphasizing here. No one deserves to be elected, so “the election of any is a merciful gift of God that cannot be claimed as a democratic right.”¹⁰

When Paul says, “if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works,” he is not suggesting that salvation used to be based on works but now it’s by grace. Paul is using words “no longer” not in a temporal sense but in a logical sense. He’s saying, “God chooses the elect by grace, so works play no role in election.”¹¹

This truth should make believers humble and grateful. God chose us for salvation not because we are good but because he is good. Second, the doctrine of election should encourage evangelism. We should never write people off thinking they’re too far gone to get saved, because salvation is based ultimately on the gracious choice of God. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37).

This is good news not only for those sharing the gospel, but also for those *hearing* it. You may think that God would never save the likes of you. Yet Scripture says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15)!

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

*’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!*

⁷ Tamar Fox, “Who Are Messianic ‘Jews’?” *My Jewish Learning* [online]. Retrieved on 1 April 2022 from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/messianic-judaism/>.

⁸ Sarah Posner, “Kosher Jesus: Messianic Jews in the Holy Land.” *The Atlantic* [online]. Retrieved on 1 April 2022 from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/kosher-jesus-messianic-jews-in-the-holy-land/265670/>.

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 1243.

¹⁰ Schreiner, 568.

¹¹ Doriani, 383.

This hour could be “the hour” for you – that life-changing moment when you take God at his word, turn from your sin, and trust Christ to save you. Then you too will become part of God’s people, “a remnant, chosen by grace.”

There’s always a remnant. It’s all of grace. But what about the rest? That’s the third point we want to consider, and Paul speaks to it in verses 7-10.

3. Accounting for the rest (vv. 7-10)

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.”

- Romans 11:7-8

“The rest” (v. 7) refers to the majority of Israelites – those not chosen by God but hardened by God. The word “hardened” (*pōroō*) means “to make hard” or “to render insensitive.” This act of God is not only *causative* (the ultimate reason it happens), but it is also punitive (a response to Israel’s sin). Because Israel tried to obtain righteousness through self-effort instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ, God gave them “a spirit of stupor.” This is a quote from Isaiah 29:10, which says, “For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep.” The Jews’ rejection of Christ resulted in a decreased capacity to receive him. “God gave them ... *eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear*” (v. 8). This is a quote from Deuteronomy 29:4, where Moses said to Israel, “But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” When quoting this verse in Romans 11:8, Paul says, “to this *very day*,” indicating that the hardness of Israel persists in his own day. William MacDonald wrote,

Because they refused to see the Lord Jesus as Messiah and Savior, now they lost the power to see him. Because they would not hear the pleading voice of God, now they were smitten with spiritual deafness. That terrible judgment continues to this very day.¹²

Once again we see this tension between two realities clearly taught in Scripture: Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. John Calvin, who is often assumed to have a lopsided view of things, holds this tension well, writing in his commentary,

As it belongs to him to give eyes to see, and to enlighten minds by the spirit of judgment and understanding, so he alone deprives us of all light, when he sees that by a wicked and depraved heart of the truth *we of our own accord wish for darkness*.¹³

¹² MacDonald, 1724.

¹³ Calvin’s Commentaries, volume 7, Isaiah 1-32 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003) p. 320.

What a warning this is to us not to receive the grace of God in vain! If we reject God's offer of salvation, we become responsible for our own ruin. In verses 9-10, Paul quotes from Psalm 69:22-23, saying,

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."

We're not sure exactly what the word "table" represents in this context, but I think that David's words in Psalm 23 can give us a clue. In that psalm David says to the Lord, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Ps. 23:5). The table there represents the blessings of God that believers enjoy. Think of "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21), which represents all of the blessings and privileges that we enjoy in Christ together as his people. So, the table of unbelievers would be everything they look to for satisfaction. God says their "table" will become a "trap." Their source of satisfaction will become the scene of their own destruction.¹⁴

If you have yet to trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior, I urge you to do so today. The table that the Lord prepares for us through the finished work of Christ is one of eternal blessing. Any other table is a banquet in the grave, resulting in eternal death.

If you are a believer, rejoice that God has opened your eyes and ears to the truth of the gospel. Thank God that he has not rejected his people, "a remnant chosen by grace." God continues to build his church to this very day – and one day this remnant will become a multitude too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language. We will stand before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in white, and we will shout with a great roar, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9-10) – and we will feast in the house of Zion.

¹⁴ Schreiner, 574.