

## **The Present and Future Israel**

### **Romans 11:1-36**

For ‘modern’ people, proud of their technological advances, history holds little interest or relevance. But in the divine schema, and for the New Testament authors and readers, history is central to two related questions: (a) Can God be trusted: will he deliver on his promises? (b) Does it count for anything to be the people of God? In other words, the future of the Church – and our personal futures as a subset of the Church – arise out of the future of Israel.

If God’s promises to Israel lapse, then his promises to us may also. If Israel is no longer the people of God, then the time could come when the Church is – when Christians are – no longer his people. So any question about Israel is simultaneously a question about God and about us.

#### ***Day One: Romans 11:1-5 Does God Reject his People?***

Israel’s massive failure to believe in Christ does not call into question God’s faithfulness to his promises, because at least a small portion has come to faith, just as in Elijah’s time. These are evidence of God’s faithfulness because their faith is a result of God’s prior activity: foreknowledge (pre-selection), reserving, election (choosing), and grace. What is true of Israel is true also of his Church and of you individually: conversion is always a sign of God’s gracious initiative in foreknowledge and election. Reflect this morning on his compassion toward you, and give thanks.

#### ***Day Two: Romans 11:6-7-10 Who Rejected Whom?***

On the face of it, Paul seems to attribute Israel’s rejection of Christ to God’s own rejection of Israel: “What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened.” Two factors militate against this interpretation.

For one, this paragraph recalls 9:30-10:3, which acknowledged Israel’s zeal for God and pursuit of righteousness, *but also* indicated

that Israel was culpable for seeking righteousness in the wrong way, by works, seeking to establish their own righteousness rather than throwing themselves on the mercy of Christ.

For the other, both supporting quotes – Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 – reference Israel’s earlier (first in the wilderness, then before the exile) resistance to God.

So God’s hardening does not cause Israel’s resistance; it is God’s judicial verdict on those who resist him. God gives them what they ask for: when he softens their hearts and opens their minds, if they do not respond to him, he may instead harden their hearts and close their minds.

The same happens today. When God draws people to himself, it is possible to see them become more receptive to the gospel, as they understand its message for the first time, and find it attractive. But the gospel typically comes with a cost, and often people pull back at the notion that God demands to be first and foremost in our lives. When someone draws back from God, he often draws back from them in judgment.

Pray for ‘seekers’ at CBCGB who have been exposed to the gospel over the years, that they will not draw back, and run the risk that God does likewise.

#### ***Day Three: Romans 11:11-16 Has the Last Chapter Been Written?***

Given that Israel is under divine hardening, is its future lost?

No, because God’s plan is two-staged. First, God -- and Paul -- switches his focus to the salvation of the gentiles. This confirms that God is about salvation more than about judgment. And that God delivers on his promises: when Israel rejects the gospel, God does not turn his back on humanity, but extends his grace to others. Secondly, in so doing, God – and Paul – hope to arouse Israel from its stupor, to see, and to reclaim, its lost birthright.

In response, first, give thanks to God for not deserting the human race, but turning to us gentiles, despite our greater moral and spiritual distance from him. Pray, secondly, for Israel, not politically in Palestine, but spiritually around the world, that more of the Jewish people will come to acknowledge their rejection of Christ to be a mistake, and will come to him for salvation.

***Day Four: Romans 11:17-20a Boasting Over Israel?***

Paul's warning to the Christians in Rome may be exactly the opposite of what many conservative American evangelicals need to hear today.

In ancient Rome, the preaching of Christ led to extensive rioting by Jews, which led, in turn, to an imperial edict expelling Jews (and Jewish Christians) from the city. Several years later, the next emperor allowed them to return to the city. By this time, the local church – and its leadership – was overwhelmingly gentile. Given the ethnic and cultural differences, the shift in church culture would have been dramatic for both Jew and gentile, and former 'second-class citizens' have become the church leadership. This apparently tempted gentile Christians to boast over Jewish Christians, that both God and society preferred them.

Today, the more likely problem is the reverse, as well-meaning conservative Christians support the secular state of Israel even against Palestinian Christians. Pray for: (1) greater political discernment on the part of conservative Christian leadership, (2) less confusion over the identification of secular political Israel with ancient Israel as the people of God, and, (3) more attention to the human rights of all parties in the Middle East, including Palestinian Christians.

***Day Five: Romans 11:20b-24 Be Afraid!***

A great many Christians assume that God will treat us differently than he treated Israel, that his relationship with them was

characterized by fierce judgment, while with us, gentle love. Instead, Paul characterizes each in the same two terms: kindness and sternness; kindness to those who persist in faith, sternness to those who turn from him. .

Pray for yourself, your family, and your small group: that you will each remain in the faith, and in the kindness – rather than the sternness – of God, lest you be cut off from him.

***Day Six: Romans 11:25-32 A Future for Israel***

While Paul does not give many details, he holds out hope that Israel will turn to Christ in faith one day. The hope is built less on Israel, though, than on the character of God: He will turn godlessness from Israel (11:26); he will take away their sins (11:27); he still loves Israel (11:28); his gifts and call are irrevocable (11:29); he has mercy on all the disobedient (11:32).

Worship God this morning for these attributes: forgiveness, love, persistence, and mercy. And thank him for ways that you have seen those attributes at work in your life.

***Day Seven: Romans 11:33-36 Grace We Do Not Deserve***

In this doxology, Paul worships God for the brilliance of his salvific plan, a plan which no one could have anticipated, and which leaves him in amazement. The key to this plan is that God saves sinners who are properly subject to his judgment.

In 11:34, Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13, a famous passage which promises Israel that God will forgive her sin, rescuing her from judgment and exile, and caring tenderly for her. In 11:35, he quotes from Job 41:11, to make the point that God shows this kindness to people who have no claim on it or on him.

Romans 9-11 ends on a high note. Praise to God that though we have no rightful claim on him, still he offers us grace.