



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 17: Romans 11:1-24

In previous lessons we have seen that God has worked providentially to set apart the Israelite nation. Not only that, but God ensured that the Messiah would descend from specific descendants of Abraham. Yet in chapter 10 we saw that the Jews rejected the Messiah, and the Gentiles were the ones who responded in belief. In chapter 11 Paul will answer the question of what that means for the Jews going forward.

Before You Begin read Romans 11:1-24 and mark any key words or phrases that you find.

Read Romans 11:1-2a

Paul begins with a rhetorical question, “Has God rejected his people?” And the natural response, “By no means!” Once again, the idea of God rejecting the nation of Israel is unfathomable to him. How can he be so sure? Because he himself is an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. He then repeats again that God has not abandoned those whom he foreknew. Most sources agree that this is a reference to 1 Samuel 12:22. Remembering back to chapter 10, Paul’s point is that God has not rejected his people, the people have rejected God.

All of this also ties into an important word, “foreknew,” in verse two. Remembering back to our study of the foreknowledge of God from chapter eight, and keeping everything Paul is saying in context, God foreknew, or predestined, the nation of Israel to be those to receive the Old Law, and ultimately to bring forth the Messiah. That being said, although God had a predetermined plan for the nation as a whole, as Paul has been demonstrating the individuals

within that plan were still free to choose whether to follow or reject their Creator.

Based on our study, describe biblical predestination in your own words.

Read Romans 11:2b-4

Chapter 10 concluded with Israel’s rejection of God, however now Paul is moving the focus to the idea that, even in the darkest of times, there has always been a faithful remnant. He is reminding us of Elijah’s plight recorded in 1 Kings 19:10. This was arguably the darkest moment in Elijah’s life. Ironically it was immediately following what must have been the most awe-inspiring moment of Elijah’s life. In 1 Kings 18 Elijah’s faith is so strong that he is able to stand alone (except for the Almighty of course) before 450 prophets of Baal and leave victorious. But now, Jezebel is blaming him for their deaths and has put a bounty on his head. Elijah is hiding for his life, Jezebel has been decimating the Lord’s altars, and Elijah feels completely alone in every way imaginable.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you could relate to what Elijah was feeling here? Where you felt alone and that everyone was out to get you?



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Yet what was God’s response to Elijah?

First of all, I would like to point out that Elijah was not condemned for struggling. He was, in all likelihood, in what we would refer to as a major depressive episode. Yet God did not condemn him for this. What God did do, however, was demonstrate to Elijah that he was never alone at all. Clearly God is with him, but there were also 7,000 faithful Israelites who had refused to worship a false god.

How does Paul tell us this remnant was chosen?

I believe this is a powerful lesson for us today. Satan is attacking us on all sides. Sometimes it feels so very lonely. Although we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood (Hebrews 12:4) it is clear that societal persecution is on the rise in America. Our speech is being censored and there are threats against our right to assemble together. As soon as we begin to get our feet under us it seems that Satan hurls another dart. But sisters we must remember, we are not alone. First of all, our God will be with us no matter what. But there will always be those who remain faithful to Christ. We must be there to edify, strengthen and encourage each other, and remind each other that we are not alone.

What are some ways we can encourage and support each other during these trying times?

Where does Paul consistently go to help the Christians at Rome understand God’s plan? He never says, “I think,” or “I feel,” he consistently refers back to Scripture. Take a minute to count how many times Paul has referenced Old Testament Scriptures so far in Romans.

Read Romans 11:5-10

Verse six is referring back to 9:31-32. Paul’s point is that grace is no longer grace if it is something that we can earn or deserve. The entire point of grace is that it is unmerited favor. Notice that Paul uses the word, “grace,” four times in verses 5-6. This typically means that what he is saying is important and we need to take notice. He is pointedly trying to help the Jews understand that salvation is either faith based or works based, it cannot be both.

Paul continues, if this choosing is based on grace, why didn’t the entire nation receive it? Verse eight elaborates, and actually seems to be a combination of two different Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah 6:9-10 is actually referenced 6 other times in the New Testament, (Mt 13:10-17, Mk 4:10-12, Lk 8:9-10, Jn 12:39-40 and Acts 28:25-29) (Pollard 388). The point of these passages was not that God himself would harden their hearts, but that they would resist his message to the extent of hardening their hearts to his word.

At this point, Paul is trying to get his readers to understand the role of personal choice in salvation. God did not abandon his people, salvation is still offered to them, however they have rejected it. They have hardened their hearts to his plan for reconciling sinful man to himself because they could not accept that God’s plan was in reality different than what they had always expected. We must remember that we worship the same God today that Paul is writing about. Salvation is still offered to all men, however there



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are still men who will harden their hearts to God’s plan when His will is different than what we like or expect.

Why did Israel fail to obtain what it was seeking? (Verse 7)

How receptive are we to God’s word? Are there areas in which we have hardened our hearts as the Jews had?

Read Romans 11:11-12

Here Paul differentiates between the idea of stumbling and falling. Stumbling is a hiccup that you can recover from fairly easily. A fall, however, can be much more serious. Did God put them in a position where they would fall and not be able to recover? Paul’s answer is, “By no means!” Through the imperfect law of the Jews, the law they could not keep perfectly, came the Messiah and salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike. But now, just maybe, as the Old Covenant made the Gentiles especially appreciative of being allowed adoptions, Paul’s hope is that the roles will reverse, and the Jews will begin to long for the relationship with God that the Gentiles are now a part of. And the full inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles will bring a whole new level of joy and praise to God Almighty for his salvation!

Read Romans 11:13-16

In verse 13 Paul very clearly changes directions with the statement, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles.” This is where it is important to remember that the church in Rome was comprised of both Jew and Gentile

Christians. Paul has been primarily focusing on the Jews and helping them understand their place in God’s larger plan. Now he will begin to focus on the Gentiles.

It is notable that here Paul defines himself as the “apostle to the Gentiles.” He has reminded the Jews that as a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin he is one of them. However, Paul was also born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28). As such he was uniquely qualified for the work he was called to do with the Gentiles. Until this point, he has been focusing on his love for his kinsmen and desire for them to come to salvation. Now he is going to begin a plea for the Gentile brethren to have the same heart. He is reminding the Gentiles of the benefit the Israelite nation has been to the whole world, and how that benefit could only increase by more Jews coming to Christ.

What is Paul’s motivation in this section?

What is Paul’s hope for the Jews in this section?

Read Romans 11:17-21

Paul now begins using an analogy of an olive tree. This tree had been carefully cultivated (the Israelite nation) and once it was firmly rooted wild olive shoots (the Gentiles) were grafted in among the original branches. Both the original and the grafted branches were able to share equally in the nourishment provided from the root (Jesus). It appears, however, that some of the Gentiles had become arrogant about being adopted into the family of God, and perhaps even



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looked down on the Jews for their struggle to reconcile the old and new covenants.

He is reminding the Gentiles that they have no room to boast, and in fact, while some of the original branches were broken off (the Jews who rebelled against God) the same thing could happen to the Gentiles if they were not on their guard. He is reminding them to stay humble in their faith and remember to fear the living God. The word for “fear” here can also mean reverence or respect (Zodhiates). This can reference back to 9:20-21 and the idea of the potter and the clay. Why does Paul encourage caution? Because just as God did not spare the Israelites from the consequences of their choices, he will hold the Gentiles accountable for theirs.

For many years the churches of Christ had the reputation of believing we were the only ones going to Heaven. How might these verses apply to this mindset?

What is Paul’s hope from the Gentiles in this section?

This is reminiscent of Matthew 7:3 and Jesus’ teaching about the log and the speck. Paul is cautioning the Gentiles about being so focused on the Jew’s shortcomings that the Gentiles fall into the same trap.

Are there areas we are prone to fall into this trap as well?

If so, what actions can we take to safeguard from this as Paul is encouraging the Gentiles to do?

Read Romans 11:22-24

And here Paul gets to the crux of the matter: personal choice. God is both kind and severe. He is kind to those who live in obedience, and severe with those who reject him. These verses are vital for us to understand for several different reasons:

1. God expects us to continue in his kindness (22). This carries with it the idea of continuing to live faithfully so that God can continue to bless us spiritually.
2. If we do not, we will be cut off (22). This disavows the idea of “once saved always saved.” Paul has clearly been writing to Christians, those who have a sincere belief in God. Yet just as clearly, he says that if they do not continue to live in obedience they will be cutoff.
3. If we rebel against God and are cutoff, as long as there is breath in us we can repent and come back to him (23). Although “once saved always saved” is not a biblical concept, neither is “once condemned always condemned.”
4. God desires the Jews to return to him and live faithfully for him (24). Even after everything they have done, even though they were directly responsible for the crucifixion of his son, God still desires that that the Israelites return to him with sincere hearts. He is willing to graft them back in as if they had never left.



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Who has the power to graft people in or cut people off?

Since God is the one with the power to graft people in or cut people off, how does this apply to the idea of whom we fellowship, and how we make those decisions?

Do we balance the severity and kindness of God?

Even after everything, neither Paul nor God have given up on the Jews obeying the gospel. What can we learn from this? Are there those we have given up on?

Paul has now used both the analogy of adoption and the analogy of the branches to describe the equality we have in Christ. Do a heart/actions check, and consider the different social classes, education levels, maturity levels, races, ethnicities etc., in your congregation and ensure that there are none you struggle to treat as equals. As you consider this, how much variety is there in your congregation? Why might that be, and what can be done to change that and ensure that all are equally encouraged to be grafted into the family of God?

Pollard, Paul PhD. (2018). Truth for Today, Romans an Exegetical Study. Searcy, AR. Resource Publications.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.