

Romans (11:1-6)

Chosen by Grace

Part 50 - October 9, 2005

MIRACLE NATION

We're in chapter eleven of Romans. In chapter nine Paul dealt with Israel's past. In chapter ten he dealt with their present. And now in chapter eleven he's dealing with their future.

The Jews, as a nation, are a modern miracle. In 70 AD the Romans absolutely destroyed Jerusalem and banished all of the Jews from their own city.



SIDEBAR: Roman Colosseum. Professor Geza Alföldy (of Heidelberg University) recently deciphered remnants of an altar inscription in the Colosseum that translates partially to: "Erected with the spoils of war." Construction officially began only two years after the sacking of Jerusalem (72 AD). And according to many archeologists, it was funded entirely by the vast treasure of the Jewish temple.

- The Israelites were dispersed throughout the empire.
- Hebrew vanished as a spoken language (circa 200 AD).

Then about 1900 years later, in 1948, the unimaginable happened; Israel was given back their homeland. And through miraculous victory after miraculous victory, they held onto it.

- In 57 years they've grown from 650,000 to 6,000,000.
- Hebrew has now returned as a modern spoken language.

To stay intact as a nation (without land or language) for almost two millennia speaks to the faithfulness of God.

- Even when I am unfaithful, the Lord remains faithful

Israel is an illustration and example of God's faithfulness. This little nation (that Paul is speaking to) outlived and outlasted the very empire that overthrew it.

- Romans eleven says that God is not finished with Israel.

LIVING PROOF

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. - *Romans 11:1-6 NIV*

In the verse just before chapter eleven (10:21), Paul had quoted Isaiah concerning the condition of Israel:

... [The Lord] says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." - *Romans 10:21 NIV*

So naturally, after this comment, Paul's readers would want to know if God has written off his people.

- So, Paul asks on their behalf: "Did God reject his people?"
- And then he reassures them: "By no means!"

Paul will spend the rest of chapter eleven explaining exactly what he means by that. But for now, let's focus on two issues:

1. This doesn't mean that every Israelite will be saved.

[Jesus Himself said] ... many Gentiles will come from all over the world and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But many Israelites – those for whom the Kingdom was prepared – will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." - *Matthew 8:11-12 NLT*

2. Let's look at the proof Paul offers for his declaration.

Paul says: "I am an Israelite myself". In other words: "Did God reject the Jews? No way; I'm a Jew!"

Paul himself is the evidence and the confirmation that his people, no matter how disobedient or obstinate, can be reborn by simply and sincerely calling on their Savior.

"God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew"

Paul is *living proof* that God reveals, redeems, and restores! Are you *living proof*?

If someone asked, “Has God rejected all the Gentile sinners?” Could you do what Paul did, and proclaim with confidence: No, God hasn’t rejected Gentile sinners. *I’m* a Gentile sinner!

- And I’ve been *accepted* because of Christ.
- He has forgiven me all my transgressions.
- He has removed my guilt and condemnation.
- And His Holy Spirit has changed my heart.
- I am not readily resistant or rebellious.
- But now I am broken and dependent on him.

By no means has God rejected Gentile sinners ... because he has not rejected me!

ELIJAH’S 7000

And then Paul reminds them of the time Elijah faced the prophets of Baal (properly pronounced: Buh-all) in a contest.

The Israelites had turned from God and were worshipping [say it with me] Ba’al ... you can use that at a Bible study the next time you want to be an insufferable know-it-all!



Baal was the “god of the storm” ... Here’s a carving of him holding a “spear of lightning”. So Elijah gets 850 pagan prophets to meet him for a sacrificial showdown. He said, “The Baal’s in your court! Let’s play Baal! They met atop Mount Carmel; probably on this very spot and they both prepared sacrifices. The prophets of Baal cried out and danced and cut themselves all day. But Baal didn’t light the fire. Then Elijah had them fill large jars with water (three times) and douse his offering to God. (There is a natural spring in the field in this photo, atop Mount Carmel.)



Long story short: God lights the fire, the people return to God, the pagan Queen Jezebel threatens Elijah, and Elijah runs away.

“I’m the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”

And God reminds Elijah: “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal”

When we focus on our fears we exaggerate our problems. But that’s not Paul’s point. He’s reminding them that though there were way more than 7000 “Israelites” in Elijah’s day, all but 7000 had chosen to leave the Lord. Remember how we saw that Gentiles can choose to be chosen? Paul is saying individual Jews can choose to be *un-chosen*.

CHOSEN BY GRACE

He's also saying there will always be a sovereignly arranged remnant who'll receive salvation through faith in God's grace.

"So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace"

We're not chosen because of who we are, what we are, or what we can produce. We're chosen by grace (not pre-chosen, just *chosen*).

- The word for "chosen" also means "called": "Called by grace."

Paul is talking about a remnant of Jewish believers, like himself, who have responded to God's call and received Christ.

Look at this interesting contrast:

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. - Romans 11:1-6

In other places in the NT, Paul contrasts *faith* and works; which are two types of *human* activity: receiving versus earning.

But here he contrasts "grace" and "works"; divine activity versus human activity; God's grace versus man's works.

Q: So, how do we harmonize the God element and the man element?



I gave an example about floating unconscious in the ocean, when an enemy ship comes by, and the captain chooses to call out and wake you and offer help. Without his grace, you'd miss the opportunity to be saved. And even after you're awake, you're completely helpless.

- You must *choose* to put your faith in his grace.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... - Ephesians 2:8 NIV

And this is how we can have the confidence of Paul, and the certainty that we're *living proof* of God's grace.

- It's not *what* we can produce, but *who* we choose to embrace!
- For even when we're unfaithful our Savior remains faithful!

If I was chosen by my performance I could lose my position, but I've been chosen by grace, and I'm anchored in grace. I'm rescued, restored, and refined by God's grace.