

Romans (11:7-10)

Softening by Hardening

Part 51 - October 16, 2005

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After almost 2000 years without land or language, our generation witnessed the return of Hebrew as a spoken tongue, and Israel restored as a sovereign nation. Israel's independence was largely made possible, because of (post World War II) national and international outrage over the Holocaust, and compassion for the remaining Jewish refugees.



Many theologians see May 14, 1948 (Israel declared independence) as a fulfillment of an OT prophecy: Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones.

The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. -
Ezekiel 37:1 NIV

This was about 580 BC (as the Babylonians exiled Israel). God explained (37:11) that the bones were Israel, and they were "very dry" (37:2) because any and all hope of resuscitation was gone. But then something really weird happened:

[God] said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. - *Ezekiel 37:4-7 NIV Condensed*

Did you know you know a song about this vision? "Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones ... Oh, hear the word of the Lord. The foot bone connected to the leg bone ..."

... I will bring you back to the land of Israel ... I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land." - *Ezekiel 37:12,14 NIV*

And some see the "valley of bones" as representing the victims of the Holocaust whose plight gave rise (through international sympathies) to Israel's restoration as a nation. And this prophecy couldn't have been fulfilled before 1948 because it's only half of Ezekiel's larger prophecy.

And they will all have one shepherd. And David my servant will be their prince forever. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy ... - *Ezekiel 37:24-28 NIV Condensed*

And because King David was quite dead at the time of Ezekiel's prophecy this is almost certainly a Messianic reference.

... the Lord God will give [Jesus] the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever ... - *Luke 1:32-33 NIV*

As I said last week: God isn't finished with Israel yet!

RECAPPING ROMANS

Now, Paul has said that: Israel is disobedient and contrary to God (*Rom 10:21*). And that despite this, God has not rejected Israel (*Rom 11:1*). And now because they've rejected God's grace, they've hardened.

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever." - *Romans 11:7-10 NIV*

So we start with: "What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain"

Q: What did they seek so earnestly?

Q: And why didn't Israel obtain it?

We find all three answers a chapter back in Romans 10:3:

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. - *Romans 10:3 NIV*

A: What they sought was: "the righteousness that comes from God"

A: They failed to obtain it because:

They: "sought to establish their own"

They: "did not submit to God's righteousness"

"What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain" (*Rom 11:7a*)

Q: Why? Arrogance.

"But the elect did" (*Rom 11:7b*)

Q: Why? Humility.

OCEAN OF ARROGANCE

“The others were hardened” (Rom 11:7c)

To be hardened simply means (like concrete) to be set in our ways. Unwilling to change, bend, or flex our will to the Lord’s.



I suppose it’s hard for a fish to know it’s wet. Wet is all there is for a fish. In the same way, it’s hard for us to know that we’re arrogant toward God. Arrogance toward God is all there is in our modern world. It’s the ocean we swim in. We don’t even know it’s there, because we can’t see it. We look through *it* to see everything else.



The ancient man approached God ... as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock [i.e. on trial]. Modern man is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, [we are] ready to listen. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the Bench and God in the Dock. – C.S. Lewis, *Essay Collection*, pg 36



That’s virtually what it means to be modern: the imperceptible feeling – the assumption we don’t even know we have – that we’re in charge, that we’re the big fish! This concrete set-in-our-ways hardening has to be broken and our eyes have to be opened, and it can only happen through Christ.

- Unless we admit our blindness, we cannot see.

And when we refuse to admit it, God will crank up the pressure.

God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day (Rom. 11:8)

TWO HARDENINGS

I suppose there are two types of spiritual stupor or blindness or deafness or hardening:

1. Redemptive Hardening

This is when God’s call pushes a person to go further down their *chosen path* (to suffer more of the consequences of *their choices*), in order to come to a place of deeper brokenness. We see Jesus do this with the Pharisees quite a bit.

When clay begins to dry out, you can restore it with water. But the dryer the clay, the more efficiently it’ll absorb. It’s best to be completely dry and broken into pieces.

- The more we surrender, the more we can receive.

We must be fully broken of our pride, self-sufficiency, and self-centeredness before we can truly surrender to God's sovereignty and become receptive to his grace.

2. Judicial Hardening

This is when God stops calling, because he knows the person will never surrender their will to his. If redemptive hardening is discipline, then judicial hardening is condemnation. The Lord says: "I will let you go and call you no more." Really, the only thing that keeps our hearts remotely open to Jesus' Lordship is his continual appeal to our hearts.

- We must make every effort to continually surrender

We must start with the position: Lord you are only good, all the time; help me to understand and comprehend as best I can. Even our hearts will deceive us, therefore we must give as much as we know of ourselves, to as much as we know of God.

Then Paul quotes David: May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them (Rom 11:9)



Their *table* is self-righteousness. May that "worm" - that looks so tasty - ensnare 'em, and trap 'em, and force 'em to realize how helpless they truly are. May they *stumble* over their self-assurance until they realize that it can't support them. The word "retribution" implies a comprehension that they *deserve* the consequence of their choices.

These words of Paul's may have been spoken to the house of Israel, but they apply to each one of us.

May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever (Rom 11:10)

"Darken their eyes" - let them never "see" a semi-satisfactory answer that will keep them from salvation.

"Bend their backs" - let them feel the burden they're carrying without Christ.

- In other words: Don't let 'em find relief until they find redemption!

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. -
Matthew 11:28-30 NIV