

Romans

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Romans 9-11



Introduction to Romans 9-11

- In these three chapters Paul attempts to untangle the biggest knot in the early church: the question of the Jews. If you recall from the beginning of this study on Romans, so much of the content of the letter is directed primarily toward the Jewish Christians in the congregation. There were a million small issues related to things like food and what day of the week worship should be held, but underneath it was the biggest question: Given that the Jews were God's chosen people who always had a central place in God's story with humanity, what does it mean now that when the long promised Messiah finally arrives that not only did the Jews reject Him, but they crucified Him? How does the church move forward holding both ends of the paradox? God's chosen people are also the murderers of God's only Son.

- On top of the broad scope of the question is the deeply personal inner conflict within Paul himself. He never forgets that he himself is a Jew. He is the embodiment of the entire conflict that divided the first century church. Thus as Paul writes, he does not write as an angry man with an axe to grind, but rather as one with a broken heart.

- There was no avoiding the question. When the story of the early church begins in the opening chapters of Acts, the church is entirely Jewish. Until the persecution of Stephen in chapter 8, the church exists only within the city walls of Jerusalem. Once the persecution began the Christians fled the city and scattered all around the Roman empire, to Syria, to what is now Turkey, and even to Rome itself. Later when Paul went on his missionary journeys, as he would venture into each new town, he would begin by going to the synagogues, to argue from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, the end result being that the first members of each congregation in each town were Jewish. But as more and more Gentiles came into the church and understood both the role of the Jews in the Old Testament and the role of the Jews in the crucifixion of Christ, the story itself was driving a wedge into the church. Paul's goal as a pastor then is to try to bring unity to a fracturing church.

- First, Paul points out that while its true that the Jews rejected and crucified Jesus, not all the Jews did so. Many believed in Christ and followed Him. Paul argues that there were always Jews who rejected God and often they were in the majority, but Paul also points out that even in the darkest times of Israel's apostacy there was always a "righteous remnant", the handful of those who held to the true faith even when everyone else had turned their backs and gone another way. Elijah was sure that he was all alone in his faith, but God told him no, that there were 7000 true believers who were waiting for him when the rest of the nation had turned to Canaanite gods. This idea was a key part of Isaiah's preaching. In Romans 9:27-28, Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22 where though Israel's sons are as numerous as the sand of the sea, "it is the **remnant** that will be saved".

- Second, Paul takes a step back to help us see the big picture. God has a plan. God has **always** had a plan, going back to the beginning of time. Paul argues, for instance, that God hardened Pharoah's heart so that He might demonstrate His power and earn Israel's trust. Further, God is God. Who can judge Him? This is His Creation to do with as He will. If God were to use the Jews and their rejection of Him to make possible the establishment of a relationship with the Gentiles, then so be it.

- At the same time that Paul paints a picture of the unquestionable sovereignty of God, he still firmly holds on to humanity's free will. The Jews took the 10 Commandments and turned them into an impenetrable maze of laws, rules, and traditions, as a means of earning salvation. The Jews chose personal achievement over genuine faith. But Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 10:11, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed" and Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved". It's on us to believe and call on His name.

- Yet Paul tells the Gentiles that they have no place for pride in having to come to God the right way, for they are but a wild olive bush that has been grafted onto the cultivated olive trees of the garden.

- The goal for God is that since the beginning His plan and purpose has been that all should be saved, both Jew and Gentile alike. God does not desire "for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).