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The Christian and the Jew

by Ray C. Stedman

This eleventh chapter of Romans throws a great deal of light on the strangest nation that ever existed – the nation of Israel. Today we view it against the background of over forty centuries of anti-Semitism, that dark, unexplainable, yet consistently recurring pattern of hatred against the Jews. You may have read in the paper recently of the sudden and violently brutal attack against a Jewish rabbi in New York that resulted in his death. It stirred up an entire neighborhood there. Whether this is just hoodlumism or another outbreak of anti-Semitism is not particularly clear, but it is true that we never seem to get away from the strange and unexplained hatred of the Jew. The root of anti-Semitism is undoubtedly the resentment that other nations feel against the Jews' claim to be God's chosen people, and it finds expression in various ways, some violent, others merely mockery. Perhaps one of the best known expressions of this feeling in its milder form is the little jingle:

How odd
of God
To choose
the Jews

This is the background of this chapter in which Paul asks, and answers, two questions which are still being asked today about Israel:

The first question is in Verse 1: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people?" To phrase it another way, "Is Israel a total loss as far as God is concerned?" Is it true that the Jews have really had their chance? Is there no hope of salvation for a Jew?

The second question is in Verse 11: "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall?" That is, "Is God through with Israel as a nation?" Is there no longer a place for them as a chosen people in the future history of the world? And you will recognize that

these are questions that are still being asked about this enigmatic people.

We want to examine these questions as Paul brings them out, but, as interesting as these questions are, they are not the major reason why this chapter was written. I think we will totally miss the point if we stop with merely answering these questions. I know that many people divide the letter of Romans into three great divisions: Chapters 1-8 they say are doctrinal, Chapters 9-11 are dispensational (having to do with God's dealing with Israel), Chapters 12-16 are practical in their application. I think this is a mistake because it treats Chapters 9, 10, & 11 as though they were merely a parenthesis in Paul's development – sort of an interjection of Paul's favorite hobby horse – his concern for the Jews which he couldn't get away from (so he kept putting them in – in somewhat the same way that Baptist preachers are accused of interjecting the mode of baptism into their subject matter). But we must never forget that Chapters 9-11 are really a great illustration of what Paul has been teaching the Christians in Chapters 1-8.

Therefore, we will miss the point unless we apply this illustration to what he is saying. In other words, if we want to understand how God works with us, we can look at the way he is working with Israel.

So let's look at the illustration now, beginning with the first question that Paul asks, "**Is Israel a total loss?**"

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Eli-

jah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written,

"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day."

And David says,

"Let their feast become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a retribution for them: let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs for ever."

{Rom 11:1-10 RSV}

Now, the question is, "Is God through with Israel?" When God set the nation aside upon the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, their appointed Messiah and Redeemer, and turned to the Gentile world, does this mean that the Jew is cut off from God's grace and favor?

This is the question that Paul asks, and the answer is: "No. By no means!"

Then he points to himself as an example. He says, "I myself am an example of this." The mass of the nation was blinded and hardened by their official rejection of Jesus Christ, but there is, Paul says, a remnant of grace which is permitted to see the truth about Christ and to believe. And, he said, "I am an example of that remnant." You remember that, despite his positive hatred against Christ, and, though he lived and breathed in a continual attitude of hatred and unrelenting persecution against the church of Jesus Christ, nevertheless, God's grace arrested him on the road to Damascus, and broke through the darkness, and the blindness, and brought the light of Jesus Christ to his heart.

Paul says, also, that this has been true in past days, when the light of faith of the nation has burned very low. He reminds these Gentile readers of the days when Elijah came to the conclusion that

he was the only one left who was faithful to God. After his remarkable triumph over the pagan gods on Mount Carmel, when the fire came down from heaven and consumed his offering, Elijah fled into the wilderness from the wrath of Queen Jezebel. There he crawled under a juniper and said to the Lord, "Oh, Lord, let me die! I am the only one that is left!" {cf, 1 Ki 19:4-10}.

All too often some of us in the ministry know how he felt. There are times when we feel like crawling in, and saying, "Let us die. We are the only ones left." There are some of us, in these days of declension and darkness, who have this feeling that we are the only ones that are faithful.

But God's answer to Elijah was, "Elijah, I have seven thousand men who haven't bowed their knee to Baal. You are not the only one left. Why, there are seven thousand that you don't even know about that are still true to me," {cf, 1 Ki 19:18}.

So Paul says, "God had his election of grace even in those dark days of Israel's history." But he also says that if God works this way by grace, then it can't be on the basis of works. That is, it isn't what men are doing by which they can merit this position of election in God's sight, but rather grace puts the matter beyond justifiable complacency. In other words, God saved some where none deserved to be saved – that is the argument.

So, through the centuries since Paul wrote these words, there have been Jews who were raised, perhaps, to regard Jesus Christ as an impostor; they were taught to call him a bastard; they regarded him as a blasphemer, and a man claiming to be God – yet their eyes have been opened and they have turned to faith in Christ and have been saved. There have always been a band of wonderful Hebrew Christians who have seen the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the proof that God has, even through these intervening centuries, a remnant among Israel – so Paul's answer has been well sustained.

Now, what is the application of this to us? Why does Paul tell us this about Israel? What is pictured for us in this relationship that God has with Israel?

As we have pointed out, what God does with Israel as a nation is a picture of what God does with a Christian as an individual. This is a very helpful rule of thumb to apply to your study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. When you see what God does with this peculiar, elect people, Is-

rael, then you see what he is planning to do in your particular, individual life.

Paul points out that God has rejected most of the nation, but has preserved for himself a remnant of grace. Now, what does this picture in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ? Well, as we learned in Chapters 5-8, there is a part of our life that God utterly rejects, that he will not have anything to do with, that is as utterly worthless to him as anything could be –

- Our own human efforts to please God,
- Our own attempts to do what we think is right and best without reference to the work of Jesus Christ in us,

– this is what the Scripture calls “the flesh.”

God says in these chapters that this is utterly worthless. He rejects it. He sets it aside. Though we sincerely mean to serve him (our sincerity is never in question) just as Israel through all those centuries sincerely sought to serve God through their offerings and all their little additions to the Law. Nevertheless, these things in our life are tainted by our self-interest and wrapped around by our own plans and programs, and they are disowned, utterly, by God.

The interesting thing is that when we begin to think that we really have obtained some status in God’s sight, this is the indication that we really are in a most pitiful condition. Have you noticed that? Remember that letter to the Laodicean church in Revelation, the church that could pride itself on how much it was doing and how much it owned and said of itself, “I am rich and have all things and have need of nothing.” But God said to it, “You do not realize that you are poor and wretched and miserable and blind and naked,” {cf, Rev 3:17}. This is the position of any person who thinks by their church works, by their efforts, by their sincere zeal for God’s work and program, that they are pleasing him. God says, “No! All this is set aside as utterly worthless.”

I imagine that some of you, who were listening as we went through Chapters 6, 7 & 8 of Romans, perhaps, became aware, for the time, how much of your Christian life was spent in just that way. Perhaps you realized that doing the best that you can was really an ignoring of the provision of God in Jesus Christ for you, and that you had been doing

the best that you could for a long, long time. And you wondered if, perhaps, those years were utterly wasted, and you may be even crushed by an awareness of the barrenness and fruitlessness of your Christian life. But here is a word of encouragement, because what Paul is illustrating here is that, in the life of every believer in Jesus Christ, God always preserves for himself a remnant of grace – we can put it that way. In other words, our Christian lives are never quite a total loss before God. There are many things that the Spirit of God permits us to do which are wrong – terrible, spiteful, hateful, lustful things – which fill up the record of Christian life much too much, but there are some things that you cannot do! That is what he is saying: There are barriers which you are not permitted to cross. This is what Paul means in Galatians when he says,

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. (Gal 5:17 RSV)

There is the area where God draws the line, and will not let the Christian go beyond. It is not because the Christian is trying to be good or is intent upon keeping the will of God, but simply God’s grace that draws the line, and says, “You cannot go any further.”

I wonder if most of us have not at one time or another experienced that checking point of the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever noticed in the Scriptures that, though Christians often act wrongly (and we have to admit this), it is never said of the genuine believer in Jesus Christ that this wrongness is his character, but rather that he is really something quite different from the way he is acting at the moment? You remember in Ephesians, Paul says, “once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; [therefore] walk as children of light,” {Eph 5:8 RSV}.

The basic character of the life of Jesus Christ remains unchanged, even in the Corinthians, in that church which was so troubled and so filled with problems and schisms and divisions, in those men and women who (though they were Christians) were living in dishonor and disgrace and division, he writes these words:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. {1 Cor 6:9-11 RSV}

So God preserves a remnant of grace, even in the lives of some of us who stumble and fall so frequently.

I think you can see that this is the basis for the doctrine of eternal security of the believer. Scripture says that

- It is possible to lose much,
- It is possible to remain withered and stunted as a Christian for years,
- It is possible to wander in a wilderness of unbelief where you are tortured with hunger and are thirsting after the things of God and are never satisfied,
- It is possible to stand someday before the Lord Jesus Christ and be ashamed and guilty for all the wasted years

and be saved though as by fire, and yet purely by God's grace. Scripture also says that, at that time, every man shall find praise of God – a remnant of grace. That is encouraging, isn't it?

In spite of yourself, God breaks through at times and makes you act like a Christian. This is the only basis that we have for maintaining that Christians are "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," {cf, Matt 5:13-14 RSV}.

It is true that, when the salt has lost its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out "and trodden under foot by men" {Matt 5:13 RSV}, as Jesus said. And a Christian who has not yielded his life to the controlling power of God is a worthless testimony before the world, but there will be times, even in that life, when something of Jesus Christ shows through – a remnant of grace. That is encouraging, isn't it?

Now notice, in Verse 11, Paul's question, **"Is Israel through as a nation?"**

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! {Rom 11:11a RSV}

That is, "Is Israel to be made the head of the nations, as once promised by God?" "Have they lost forever their privileged position before God?"

And, interestingly enough, many commentators today say, "Yes." They say that the church has now assumed the promises that were once made to Israel, and Israel will nevermore have a chance, as a nation, to fulfill these promises.

And, also, this is the place which the nation Israel has taken for itself today. You read the writings that come out of the land of Israel and, except for a very small group, the majority of them are taking the position that the nation Israel is no more than any other nation in God's sight, and that they want to take their place among the nations as no different than any other nation.

But Paul says this is not true. Paul says that the promises of national blessing are still valid to this nation. Then Paul has three things to say about their present rejection.

Let me just quickly go through these, because I want to come to the application of them to ourselves:

He says, first of all, that **it was necessary to set Israel aside** in order that the Gentiles might be saved:

But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as the first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. {Rom 11:11b-16 RSV}

In other words, he is simply saying that we must understand that Israel was set aside, and it was necessary that they be so, in order that the gospel go out to the Gentiles.

Remember when Jesus was approached one time by a woman from the coast of Tyre and Sidon? She wasn't an Israelite. She came and asked him to heal her daughter, and, at first, he wouldn't even speak to her – he uttered not a word. But she wasn't discouraged, and she kept after him. Finally, he said to her, "I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," {Matt 15:24}. In other words, the time is not yet come to reach Gentiles, and this woman was a Gentile. But she persisted in her faith and her knowledge of the basic character of God, and, as you know, she won through and the Lord did deliver her daughter. But this is simply our Lord's recognition that there was a time when God confirmed himself in a special sense to the nation Israel, and it was necessary that Israel be set aside before that free gift of God's grace could go out to the Gentiles.

God had originally intended to use Israel as a showcase of his grace. He said,

"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit... And you shall chase your enemies,... and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you ... {Lev 26:3-4, 26:7a, 26:8b RSV}

The crops would not fail, the wine would last till the next vintage, they would be healthy and strong, and so on. He promised that he would break off the shackles from their back and they would walk uprightly among men. The nation was to be such a manifestation of the visible presence of God that all the nations of the world would hear it and come to them and seek to know the secret of this people. But, as we know the record of history, they did not do this because they had not learned the basic lesson of human life – that man himself is nothing. They seized the position of favor and perverted it, and made it center upon their own glory, so that ultimately God cut them off as a nation, in order that the gospel might go out to the Gentile world. It was sent out to the Gentiles, who had no standing before God at all, in order that the grace

might operate in their lives, so that when Israel would see how God would bless people who had no standing, no rights, no covenant in his sight, they might become jealous, learn of their own insufficiency and thus turn to God on the right basis.

This is God's great program – what he is working out in the world today. Paul argues that if the setting aside of them brought this blessing to the world, how much more will their restoration create worldwide blessing.

Out of this comes this next thought. He says that **the Gentiles need to beware** lest they, too, become proud and self-sufficient before God:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. {Rom 11:17-21 RSV}

I think this is a word well taken.

Have you ever really realized that God was under no obligation to save you? He didn't have to. He would be perfectly just in not giving you a chance at all. Have you ever realized that?

The Jews at least had a covenant to which they could point, but we who are Gentiles don't have anything to stand on before God. At any time, God could stop this process of calling out believers from among the Gentile nations and none of us would have any just cause of complaint before him!

We take our salvation so much for granted, I am afraid. Listen to these words from Helmut Thielicke, one of the great preachers in Germany today:

We do well to grasp the tremendous implication of this thought, for it is to the effect that my acceptance by God cannot be taken for granted, and that Jesus' death on the cross for me cannot be taken for granted. We European Christians have gradually become accustomed to the dangerous and unhealthy idea that the

grace of God is thrown at us. Voltaire cynically said of the forgiveness of God, "It is His job." But this is not so. Things are quite different from the popular assumption. The kingdom of God is not thrust upon us. The grace of God can also be silent. We certainly cannot claim it. It may be (and, if so, I cannot blame God) that in my last hour I will sink into darkness and the one figure who might be with me through the gloomy portal will be missing. It is in no sense of duty or obligation of Jesus to bear my sins and to take me through the black gate of death. If he does this, it cannot be taken for granted. And I make bold to say that even the most orthodox churchman will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is continually surprised that mercy has been shown to him.

That is a rather startling thought, isn't it?

Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon concerning the statement of the Bible, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," {Rom 9:13 KJV}. They said to him, "How could God ever say, 'Esau have I hated'?" And Spurgeon said, "That isn't my problem. The thing that makes me astonished is how could God ever say, 'Jacob have I loved.'"

When we get into that position, I think that we will begin to appreciate the marvelous grace of God toward man.

Paul goes on to say, in the last verses here, that there is a day coming when **God will restore Israel** to its promised place as head of the nations, and all the living Israelites will be saved.

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

"The Deliverer will come from Zion,

he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

"and this will be my covenant with them

when I take away their sins."

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of the forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once

disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. {Rom 11:25-32 RSV}

I assure you that the present happenings in the land of Israel is in no sense a fulfillment of these words: God has not restored Israel to the land. God has permitted the nation to come back to the land, but this is not the restoration that is predicted here, or in the rest of the prophecies of Scripture. It is only after the darkness of that terrible day that is coming to Israel, referred to by the Lord Jesus as the "great tribulation" {Matt 24:21}, that this day shall dawn of which Paul speaks, and which was described by Zechariah when he says,

... when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. {Zech 12:10b RSV}

Then shall Israel, all Israel, turn to their appointed Messiah. But Paul's promise is that God has a place, yet, for national Israel.

What does this mean to us? Again, this is an illustration. "So," we ask, "what is he illustrating in the life of the believer?"

Well, it is exactly what we have set forth in Romans 8. There we learned that God indeed sets aside the entire self-activity of the human life as being unable to accomplish anything in his sight. And, just as God set Israel aside in order that grace may do its work among the Gentiles, so God completely sets aside all the flesh, all my self-effort, all that I am by human nature; and then (and only then) do I begin to learn what God can do through me.

When we freely admit in practice – not just in word, but in practice – that without Jesus Christ we can do nothing, then we shall learn that we can do all things through him who strengthens us {cf, Phil 4:13}. It is

- When we quit trying to plan everything out and think that it all depends on us,

- When we begin to realize that he has placed within us the very One who is able to plan all things well,
- When we understand that he intends to do through us – through our will, through our mind, through our thoughts, through all our activity of life – that which will accomplish his purpose,

then we begin to see wonderful things happen! It isn't that we look different or that we act differently, but we begin to notice that strange things begin to happen in our lives – when we constantly expect God to work through us in Jesus Christ:

1. First, we learn that little things that we say fall with great weight upon people's minds and hearts around us. Doors open that we don't expect, and we have opportunities to move into areas that we didn't realize could ever be opened us. And sometimes our smallest remark seems to come as a bolt from heaven to somebody's heart, opening up a whole new vista of living grace, Christ working through us – that is what he is teaching here. When we are willing to let our self-effort be set aside, as God set Israel aside, then grace begins to work.
2. Secondly, we learn that it will never be any different than this, no matter how long we are Christians. We, ourselves, never become any better, or more able, to serve Christ in ourselves. Just as Gentiles, having been saved by grace, and then becoming proud and self-sufficient, find that God is just as able to cut off that grace as he is to begin it in the first place, so we, individually, as Christians, must learn that it is always, and only, Christ working in us that accomplishes the Father's will. Therefore, pride is forever our greatest temptation and our cruelest enemy. The one thing that we must continually watch is that we do not begin to feel that we are anything, or that we can do anything, it is all Christ within us!
3. The last thing is the revelation of Scripture in Chapter 8 that someday even our flesh will serve God. By his grace, in that day of which Paul speaks, when creation is freed from the bondage of sin, and the sons of God stand forth

in resurrection power, even that which has once been set aside as useless is now rendered useful to God. The sons of God, in resurrection bodies, serve God in the flesh. And then even that which was once rejected and cursed is made to fulfill the promise and to demonstrate the power of God.

Now this is why Paul ends this chapter with these wonderful words:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,

or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. {Rom 11:33-36 RSV}

How this cuts away all the pride and self-sufficiency of our lives! How this reduces us to a place of weakness – yet with the knowledge that his strength is made perfect in weakness {cf, 2 Cor 12:9}!

Now you can go out to serve in the glory of this mystery – not you any longer, but “Christ in you, the hope of glory” {Col 1:27}, working through you –

- In your home,
- In the place where you carry on your business,
- In the way you drive through traffic,
- In your attitude toward every living person you contact.

Jesus Christ at work – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year – in your life. This is the grace of God!

Prayer:

Our Father, what a revelation of the might and the power and the wisdom of your grace this gives us. How truly you set aside all the empty, foolish planning and struggling of men in order that you might provide in us that dynamo of power which

is able to be and to do all that you ask of us in Jesus Christ our Lord! Now give us the simplicity of faith to believe this, and to

begin to walk and to live in these terms, quietly trusting you to fulfill it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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