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Romans / Faithfulness of God / Romans 11

Series Number: 22

Readings:

- 1 Kings 19:11–18

- Romans 11

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
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Introduction

Introduction Proper

Haven't we heard enough about Israel?

They're always in the news, aren't they? Settlements in the West Bank, the October 7 attack, the invasion of Gaza, the war on Iran.

And they seem to be mentioned in the church service every Sunday, don't they?

Israel is a nation of only 10m people, and the total number of Jews *worldwide* is significantly less than Australia's population! (*Wikipedia*, "Jewish Population by Country"; *Wikipedia* 2026, "Israel")

So, why should we care about Israel?

Well, we shouldn't care about Israel because they're a great and spectacular people. Or because they're in the Bible. Or because they're particularly good people. They're not - Israel has proved that recently, haven't they?

Rather, we should care about Israel and the Jews for one main reason - because by looking at Israel, we get to see that the Christian God is a God who keeps his promises. Israel shows us that God keeps his promises.

History

Now, the Jews have a rich religious heritage. In ancient times, God chose a man called Abraham. And God promised him that he would make Abraham's family great - there would be more of them than the stars in the sky! He promised to give Abraham and his family the land of Palestine. And he promised that Abraham's family would greatly benefit all other peoples in the world!

Eventually, Abraham's family did grow very large, and that's where Israel came from. And at a very special mountain, Mount Sinai, God solemnly promised Israel: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" He chose them to be his special treasure out of all the nations of the world. And they promised to worship and obey him forever.

But you know what? Israel kept rebelling against God. Time and time again, century after century, Israel kept sliding further down the icy slope of unbelief.

But over the centuries, God committed to fulfil his promises using one Israelite in particular. Someone born into the royal line of a special king - king David. That person was Jesus.

Eventually, after waiting hundreds of years, he arrives! The heir to all God's promises, their rescuer, their Saviour!

But instead of crowning him, Israel rejects him. Even worse, they *murder* him!

And then, they start harassing his followers too! They were the early church, and at the start, they were mostly Jewish!

And so one of those Jewish Jesus followers, Paul - well, he has questions. Jesus was the one Israel was waiting for. How could they just reject him like that? What hope is there for Israel now?

That's what he focusses on in his letter, Romans. And today we're look at chapter 11.

So Paul says in [Romans 11:1](#): "Did God reject his people?" Is God going to keep his promises to Abraham, to Israel? Or has he given up on them?

Partly now

State the Point

And Paul answers that question in two ways. Firstly, Paul says God *is* keeping his promises partly now. He's keeping his promises partly already.

Show from the Bible

In v1 Paul says, “I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham”. God can’t have completely left Israel in their rebellion, because *Paul* is an Israelite, and *he’s* following Jesus!

But then he goes further, and he reminds us of a story from Israel’s history.

Now God had revealed his name to Israel - God’s name is Yahweh.

And back in the 9th century BC, Israel had betrayed Yahweh. They were worshipping a Canaanite god called Baal.

So Yahweh chooses a prophet named Elijah. Elijah’s job was to persuade Israel back to worshipping Yahweh, the only true God.

Israel believed Baal was a storm god who brought rain on their crops. So Elijah announces a drought on the nation to expose Baal as a fake.

The drought becomes severe, and goes for three years, but Israel doesn’t listen. Time after time Elijah speaks to King Ahab, and he tries to kill Elijah.

So eventually Elijah announces a showdown. Yahweh vs Baal. Let’s go up on a mountain and set up two offerings - one for Yahweh, one for Baal.

The god who sends fire down from the sky and burns up their offering is the real God.

Now there’s hundreds of Baal prophets. And they’re chanting, dancing, singing, cutting themselves, you name it. But Baal does nothing.

There’s one Yahweh prophet - Elijah. All he does is pray once, and fire comes down and burns up the offering.

Elijah wins! He’s proven Yahweh is the real God! Israel is going to turn back to worshipping him, right? Right?

Well...no. The king and queen refuse to listen, and actually they try to kill Elijah!

So Elijah runs away depressed. He’s failed! The nation just won’t listen!

He travels back to Mount Sinai, where hundreds of years earlier Yahweh and Israel had made promises to each other.

Elijah climbs up Mount Sinai and prays,

[1 Kings 19:14](#): “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

Elijah’s saying, “Israel has left you for good. There’s one faithful Israelite left - me. When I die, that’s it for Israel, and your relationship with them!”

And God answers him. He says yes, he’s going to judge Israel for their betrayal. But *then* says, “yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal”.

Hang on, what? Its not just Elijah? God has kept a small portion, a remnant, of Israel faithful to him! He’s preserving them so that Israel will continue, so God can keep his promises to them.

Now all that happened 9 centuries before Paul lived. But in v5 Paul says “So too, at the *present* time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”

Explain

In Elijah’s day, God could have completely rejected Israel for betraying him and worshipping a false counterfeit, Baal. Just like someone might leave an unfaithful spouse for cheating on them. But in his kindness, because *he* is faithful, he keeps a remnant of Israel pure.

9 centuries later, Paul is saying Israel murdered God’s own Son, Jesus! He could destroy them! But just like in Elijah’s day he is keeping a faithful remnant pure for himself. Paul is one of them. But there are others, thousands of Jews in the early church who love Jesus.

And notice what v6 says: “And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” In other words, this remnant isn’t preserved by God because there’s *they’ve* done anything particularly good. They’re saved purely because of God’s *kindness*.

So God hasn’t rejected Israel. He hasn’t given up on his promises. He’s preserving a remnant, a chosen few, and he will keep his promises to *them*.

But what about the rest of Israel? Well in verses 7-10, Paul quotes the Old Testament twice to show that God has hardened Israel’s hearts in their rebellion. They were still earnestly seeking to work their *own* way to God, rather than trust in Jesus.

So is that it? Will there only ever be a few Israelites saved, while the rest of them keep rebelling?

Fully later

State the Point

Well that's where our second point this morning comes in. Paul shows us that God will keep his promises to Israel *fully later*. For now, he's saved a portion of Israel, but later, he will keep his promises to *all* Israel.

Show from the Bible

In [Romans 11:11](#), Paul asks: "Did they [Israel] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?" He answers, "Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious."

Illustrate

When I was a little four year old at kindy one day, some date farmers came in to give a talk about farming. And afterward they gave us all a date to take home.

Well, I was pretty happy with that. I had never seen a date before, and it smelled sweet and delicious.

When I got home I proudly showed off the date to my mum and my brother. My brother asked for it, so I handed it to him.

Then he took a bite out of it...and I burst into tears! And I yelled for him to give it back.

See, the date was precious to me beforehand, but I wanted it *so much more* when someone else was enjoying it!

And Paul is saying that date is a bit like the Gospel, the good news about Jesus. Now I *wanted* that date before I gave it to my brother, but Israel *didn't* want the Gospel. But once my brother took a bite, suddenly I *really* wanted it.

And in the same way, because Israel rejected Jesus, the early church started preaching to non-Jews, or Gentiles, instead! Many of the Gentiles gladly followed Jesus.

And so Paul says in v12 that "[Israel's] transgression means riches for the world".

But Paul doesn't leave it there! Let's skip down to vv25-26 for a bit.

Paul says: "...Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved."

So Paul is expecting that eventually *all* Israel, not just a remnant, will get jealous of our faith. They'll believe in Christ and inherit God's promises!

Show from the Bible/Explain

Isn't that amazing? Israel have rejected God time, after time, after time. They've broken every one of God's command. They've even rejected God's very own Son, Jesus.

It would have been enough for God to just preserve *some* of them, just a remnant.

But no - God will one day bring ALL of Israel to himself!

Why? Well vv28-29 tell us:

Romans 11:28–29 NIV

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

So why will God one day bring Israel back to himself and save them? Because he promised to. Its as simple as that!

God doesn't go back on his word. He is *faithful*. Even when Israel is not. This is what true mercy and faithfulness looks like. The God we worship is *good*.

Apply

But we're mostly non-Jews, Gentiles, right? How is this relevant for us?

Well, it would be easy for us to look at Israel and go, "huh. You've rejected Christ, but we've accepted him, so God's replaced Israel with the Gentile church."

We may not even be that direct. We may just read the Bible and subconsciously think, "tut tut tut. How could Israel keep on failing. If I was there, I would have been faithful to God!"

So Paul uses a farming picture for us. Imagine an olive tree. The tree represents God's faithful people, *true* Israel. The root represents Abraham and start of Israel.

Many branches have been broken off, right? They're the Israelites who rebel. But many Gentiles, non-Jews like most of us, are *included* in the people of God. We're like branches from another tree, grafted into this one.

And Paul says, (vv17-18) “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”

We Gentile believers are not independent of Israel! Actually, through Jesus we are included into God’s promises to Abraham and Israel! So without them, we wouldn’t receive *anything* from God!

Let’s keep reading: (v19-21) “You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.”

If God was prepared to cut native branches off the tree - ethnic Israelites - what’s going to stop him cutting off the *grafted* branches - us? So we shouldn’t think we’re any better than Israel. God grafted us in by his mercy, not because we were somehow better than Israel!

So instead of shaking our heads at them, we should wonder at the faithfulness and mercy of God. He faithfully keeps his promises to Israel, and he mercifully welcomes us non-Jews - not because of anything good in us, but purely because of his kindness.

So like Paul, we shouldn’t despise the Jews, nor should we put them on a pedestal. Rather, let’s strive to love them and reach them with the life-saving message about Jesus.

With eternal wisdom

State the Point

So. Israel shows us that God keeps his promises - partially now, and fully later.

Now, I want you to see that God keeps his promises with eternal wisdom. God keeps his promises with eternal wisdom.

Show from the Bible/Explain

In [Romans 11:30-32](#), Paul talks a lot about mercy and disobedience. And it can be a little confusing, so let’s see if I can make it clearer.

Slides.

1. We Gentiles used to be disobedient to God. We didn't obey him, we just followed our own evil desires.
2. The Gospel about Jesus was preached to Israel, and Israel was disobedient to God too by rejecting Jesus.
3. Because of Israel's disobedience, the Gospel went to us Gentiles, and we accepted it. That's God's mercy to us Gentiles.
4. Israel then gets jealous, which causes them to accept the Gospel and receive God's mercy.

That's God's master plan!

And how does Paul react to this plan?

He says,

Romans 11:33 NIV

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

I must admit, I struggled with this as I prepared this sermon. I didn't react like Paul at first. Why not?

Well, to me God's plan has often seemed messy. Its complicated. It involves many people being judged by God.

But how do you tell if a plan is a *good* plan? Its a good plan if it achieves what you want it to, right?

And what does this plan achieve for God?

- God can choose a specific people for himself, Israel, and use them to rescue the whole world.
- Everyone gets to see that God is good because he punishes evil.
- *And*, everyone gets to see that God is good because he is merciful to some as well.
- He's done it in a way that makes sure no human can get arrogant, because we were all once disobedient, right?

So maybe I was seeing God's plan through the wrong lens. Maybe I've been using a lens that treats us humans as the most important thing.

But really, this plan was never *about* us! It was always about displaying *God's* character. His plan shows us his justice against evil. And his plan shows us his mercy through Jesus.

It might seem messy to us, but its not too messy for his unfathomable mind.

The plan was always about him, not us. And since he's God and we're not, that's how it should be!

Conclusion

So. Why should we care about Israel?

Because if God can be *that* faithful to such an unfaithful people, then he can be faithful to a rebel like me as well.

God promised that Israel would always be his people. He's kept that promise partially now, by saving a remnant. He'll keep it fully later, by saving all Israel. And he's kept his promises with eternal wisdom, with an intricate plan that displays his stunning character and humbles humankind.

And what was the centrepiece of that plan?

It is Jesus Christ himself, God in the flesh.

See, God didn't just look on Israel from a distance, he *became* Israel - Jesus was born a Jew!

He perfectly obeyed God like Israel should have.

And yet *Jesus* was rejected, cut off, murdered. *He* was left to die on that cross! That's the punishment Israel deserved! In fact, that's the punishment we *all* deserve!

But three days later, God the Father was faithful to Jesus too. He kept his promise and raised him from the dead.

And one day, when Israel finally accepts him, he will return to judge his enemies and his people.

Who would have guessed that a humble Jewish carpenter being crucified on two planks of wood could change the world forever??

Who would have guessed that God would use a man like that to rescue his people Israel, save many Gentiles, and make a way to forgive all of their rebellion for all time?

But he did! And that's why we're all here in this building, united as a loving community for the worship of God 2000 years later.

May we be amazed, may we come and worship our merciful, faithful God!

And could there be a better way to end than by saying this doxology together? Let's stand and worship our eternally wise God:

Romans 11:33–36 NIV

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵ “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?” ³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Confession

It's easy to read Scripture and think, “Israel, why do you keep failing again and again?” But their failings are in the Bible to show us what we're *all* really like. We are *all* disobedient to God like Israel. We *all* keep failing again, and again, and again.

But if God can be merciful to a people like Israel, he can be merciful to us too. All we need to do is believe in the true Israelite - the true human - who never failed, Jesus Christ.

So we need to come humbly to God, confess our rebellion against him, and commit to living *his* way.

So let's do that quietly in our hearts, then we'll confess our sins together.

Assurance

Romans 11:5–6 NIV

⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

None of us can be saved by our own good works. We've failed too much for that. We need God to save us by *grace* - mercifully washing away our sin, and declaring us innocent before him by his *kindness*, not by our effort.

If you trust in Jesus to save you, that's what he'll do! God *delights* to save those who humbly come to him.

If you want to know more about how to do that, please come see me after the service, I would love to speak with you more.

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