

Paul's Letter to the Romans Lesson 8

The Israelites in Paul's day were far from the plan of God. As a whole they had rejected the Messiah that they had been praying for each day. Still today they have rejected the Messiah. Based on that fact, at the conclusion of the last lesson I asked the question, has God rejected the Israelites? I then answered that question with the first part of Romans 11:1. Let us begin anew at that point in our study.

Romans 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Righteousness of God - In the righteousness of God, He has not rejected His people even though they are far from His plan of redemption through His Son who is also their Messiah. The prophet Samuel proclaimed that God would not reject or abandon His people. God had made a covenant of His own choosing with Israel. Israel did not choose God, God chose Israel.

1 Samuel 12:22 For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.

During the days of Jeremiah's prophecy, this weeping prophet begged God to reveal His intentions for the nation of Israel. God answered Jeremiah in two separate statements. If either of these statements could be fulfilled, then God would cast off Israel; however, God will not cast off Israel because the first statement can not be accomplished and the second statement would require all of His creation to be altered.

Jeremiah 31:37 Thus says the LORD, If the heavens above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done, declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:24-26 Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. ²⁵Thus says the LORD, If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, ²⁶then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.

²God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel?

Righteousness of God - **Psalm 94:14** states, "For the LORD will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance." In God's righteousness, He will not reject His people. God knew what they would do before He chose them. Their actions then and now are not a surprise to God.

Elijah wanted God to reject Israel, but God would not be swayed. Here is the story of that interchange between God and Elijah.

1 Kings 19:1-21 Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." ³And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." ⁵And he lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." ⁶Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake *baked on* hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." ⁸So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹So He said, "Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²And after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. ¹³And it came about when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

¹⁵And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; ¹⁶and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷"And it shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. ¹⁸"Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

¹⁹So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" ²¹So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

Notice that Elijah repeats a sentence for emphasis. Paul uses that sentence in Romans 11:3-4.

³"Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." ⁴But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL."

Righteousness of God - The righteous answer of God is found in verse 18 of the story presented above.

1 Kings 19:18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Elijah thinks that he is the only one left in the battle for the Lord, but that is never the case. God always has a people. Still in Israel were 7,000 followers of God about whom Elijah did not know. In addition, God chose one of them to replace Elijah. He told Elijah to seek this man out and pass his mantle to him. When it is time for an Elijah to retire, there is always an Elisha in the wings, prepared by God, ready to carry on God's work!

⁵In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. ⁷What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; ⁸just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."

Righteousness of God - In Elijah's day God had a remnant of 7,000 ready for service. The same was true in Paul's day, all in accordance with God's gracious choice. We need to understand clearly what Paul means by his statement in verse 6. Grace is a gift that is not based on works. The foul man who lives 40 years in prison and sin before encountering God might just be the man that God intends to replace the prophet He is about to take to heaven. His background means nothing to God. The new heart of the man is what matters to God. By the grace of God the man is put into the prophet's place with no track record at all. By the grace of God lives are changed regardless of man's abilities. But Israel could not accept this concept. She rejected the Messiah because He did not have the right background, pedigree, or status. Isaiah foretold God's plan for Israel when she rejected Him.

Isaiah 29:10 For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers.

In Isaiah's day a prophet reported the word of the Lord while the seer told the future. Because of Israel's rebellion, God caused the people not to understand, the prophets not to hear the word of the Lord, and the seers not to succeed in any attempt to foretell the future.

⁹ And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. ¹⁰ "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

Righteousness of God - The Jews understand Paul's purpose in using this passage from Psalms 69. They know that David is talking about what his enemies were trying to do to him. In the Psalm David pleads for the Lord to retaliate against his enemies. The Christian Jews in the church at Rome understand that David's plea turned out to be a prophecy concerning Jesus on the cross and His becoming a stumbling stone in their way because God would partially blind them. Here is a portion of that Psalm.

Psalm 69:21-23 They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. ²²May their table before them become a snare; and when they are in peace, *may it become* a trap. ²³May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, and make their loins shake continually.

¹¹I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. ¹²Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ¹³But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?

Righteousness of God - In the righteous plan of God Israel would stumble, but only far enough to allow all the people of the world to have the opportunity to know God and the Messiah. This knowledge would bring the blessing of salvation to the world, filling the Jews with jealousy. Paul understands the importance of Israel's jealousy. Seeing the blessing of the Gentiles because of their belief in the Savior will be a testimony to the Jews who are scattered, persecuted, pursued, and destroyed. The salvation of the Gentiles is important to Paul, even if only some of the Jews are moved to turn their hearts to the Lord. When they accept the Lord, they too will pass from eternal death to eternal life.

¹⁶And if the first piece *of dough* be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too.

Righteousness of God – Paul's idea in this passage comes from the Lord's instruction found in Numbers 15.

Numbers 15:19-21 then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the LORD. ²⁰Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. ²¹From the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD an *offering throughout your generations*.

Paul's purpose in this passage is to explain that just as the Jews who come to the Savior are holy, so too will the Gentiles who come be holy. Jew or Gentile – it makes no difference. The Savior is the root and He is holy. If you are attached to the Savior's root, then you are holy. Paul uses this point to lead into the following example.

¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.

Righteousness of God – This example shows two sides of the workings of God. The root of the olive tree represents God. In this example, some of the branches that should be on the tree are broken off. God then grafts branches onto the tree, sustaining them with life from the root. These branches represent the nation of Israel. But Israel became arrogant and rejected the Savior; therefore, the Savior did not support Israel in her rejection. When a Gentile or Jew becomes a Christian, God grafts him into the place where a Jew was broken off. Christians, grafted in where someone else once belonged, cannot be conceited in their positions with God. God will not accept conceit - arrogance. God desires fear - awe or reverence. God knows the heart and will not allow a person to be part of His root if he is arrogant. Conceit and fear bring out the two-edged sword of God seen in the kindness of God and the severity of God.

²²Behold then the **kindness and severity of God**; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree?

Kindness and severity of God – Two important aspects of God are seen in this passage; however, they are two of the most misunderstood aspects of God. How can God, who created everything, react to His creation with either

kindness or severity? If a man is conceited and arrogant, God responds with severity. If a man is fearful of God, God responds with kindness. Isn't there a middle ground with God? Doesn't God accept everyone? The answer to these questions is no. God looks at the heart of man and not his works. He knows the intent of each man and His punishment or blessing is totally predicated on the true heart of each man. The conceited man will be cut off from the root of the Lord while the fearful man will be grafted in.

²⁵For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

²⁷ "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Kindness and severity of God – Referring to the Lord's Word found in both Isaiah and Jeremiah, Paul proclaims that the whole process of engrafting into the olive tree of the Lord is a great mystery.

Isaiah 59:20-21 "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD. ²¹"And as for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the LORD, "from now and forever."

Jeremiah 31:33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

The Lord revealed to both Isaiah and Jeremiah His plans for His people the Israelites and all the Gentiles. One day Israel will experience the kindness of God just as the Gentiles have, yet the partial hardening of the nation of Israel coupled with their unbelief brings upon them the severity of God. The Redeemer came from Zion in the person of Jesus Christ. All who believe in Him have the law of God written on their hearts.

²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹for the **gifts and the calling of God** are irrevocable.

Gifts and calling of God - As long as the nation of Israel rejects the Savior, they are enemies of the gospel of God. But God has not rejected them because He made a covenant with them and He will keep His promise. God keeps His promise because His gifts and His callings are irrevocable; they cannot be changed or reversed.

³⁰For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³²For

God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the **wisdom and knowledge of God!** How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Wisdom and knowledge of God - The original context of Paul's quotation sheds light on Paul's intent.

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? ¹⁴With whom did He consult and *who* gave Him understanding? And *who* taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?

God did not consult anyone when He made the plan for mankind and the world. God chose Israel and made a covenant with her. He made a promise to her that He will not break. We do not understand why the hearts of Israel must be partially hardened, but it is God's divine plan. Nothing can be done by man to pay back God or purchase anything for God. Everything belongs to God - every man, every beast, every tree, every mountain, every planet, and every star. God shows mercy to man so man will show God's mercy to others with whom they interact. It is not for mankind to understand God's ways; nevertheless, man must enter into the mercies of God.