

Romans 11

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 13 March 2010 14:58

In my eyes all scripture is marvellous. Not all Christians see it this way, and so they usually avoid the 'hard bits' and keep to their favourite 'beliefs', even when challenged. How they can call them beliefs is beyond me, because a man who has little knowledge can hardly hold to true beliefs. Really, his 'beliefs' are just prejudiced snippets plucked from the air! But, it seems, few Christians read their Bibles anyway, and when they do it is grudging, because it stops them getting on with their lives. So, they get it over with quickly. And this is why they remain ignorant or badly taught.

This chapter by Paul is absolutely magnificent. It speaks of God's glorious decision to save some and not others. It is not 'glorious' because I enjoy seeing men and women lost, but simply because it is God's decision, and everything He does is glorious.

The emphasis should not be on those who are cast off, but on our own salvation. We cannot demand that God explains why He chooses some and not others to heaven, because it is His prerogative alone, not ours. God owes us nothing. He will tell us only what He wants us to know. All else is a 'mystery'. Our ignorance of what is happening in no way reduces what God does. He is above all and beyond all. We have no right whatever to demand anything, including our very life.

In this chapter we witness that God's Church began in the mists of time and will end with the final days of this earth. In between, in history, God chose who would be elect. Also, in history, those who are elect will come to know salvation, whether Jew or Gentile. This is because that is the way God planned it, and He says so in this amazing chapter!

He tells us, unambiguously, that salvation is through faith, a faith given after regeneration of our souls. The same faith saves all, and those saved all belong to the same spiritual Church. Thus saved Gentiles are equal to saved Jews. Spiritual Israel is the same as spiritual Gentiles. All belong to the spiritual Church of Jesus Christ, a fact not appreciated by many today who follow fake doctrines. In this, the way God saves, we should be thankful, praising God forever for His amazing grace and the wonderful gift He has given us in Jesus Christ!

Verses 1 - 5

1.

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of

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Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

2.

God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,

3.

Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

4.

But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

5.

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Paul has been talking about the Jews and the amazing privilege they had as a nation, a nation who rejected the Messiah. Now, because of this, he asks "Hath God cast away his people?" The answer is swift – God forbid! Many cynical Christians today cast aside the Jews, when God does not!

This is not about anyone's human interpretation; it is about properly teaching what God has actually said, whether it falls into one or other theological camp, or none. Human beings are very good at devising and following the tales of men! But not very good at believing what God has said in His word... though they claim their beliefs are genuine (when, perhaps, they are not)! As with so many other parts of scripture, this chapter is often misinterpreted.

Paul reminds his readers that he, too, is an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin. If God had discarded the Jews, then he, too, would be beyond salvation. No, "God hath not cast away his

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people which he foreknew.” The term ‘cast away’, *apōtheō*, means to repel from one’s self, to reject. Very clearly, then, Paul advises that God has not rejected Israel “which he foreknew”.

‘Foreknew’, *proginōskō*, has two possible meanings. One is to foreknow (those who are elected to salvation). The other is, to predestinate. Now, if God predestinates anything or anyone, there is no turning back; God never changes his mind. He chose Israel. Paul said God has never rejected them. Yes, He has punished them, but as a father chastises a child and yet still loves him; and as a child may leave home under a cloud for a long time but is welcomed back when they have repented (re the prodigal son).

I have said it time and again: do not treat Israel badly or think ill of her (but be realistic and do not praise or uphold her when she is wrong, as she is now. If you are unsure, it is better to be non-committal than to stand against what God has accepted). God has not rejected her. God forbid! Remember that ‘God forbid’ does not just mean ‘absolutely not’ – it means the very thought is unimaginable.... It is so out of the question as to be ridiculous to ask.

Paul reminds his readers of what God told Elijah, when he thought he was the only faithful one left in the land. He pleaded with God, saying that his enemies had killed all the prophets and destroyed the altars, “and I am left all alone, and they seek my life”.

It sometimes seems that way, does it not? It is almost in the category of temptation, one that leads us to be depressed and forlorn. But, the truth is often much brighter! God replied, ‘I’ve still got 7,000 men who have not joined the idolaters!’ God said He had ‘reserved’ them to Himself; kept them to one side as His own. They were not abandoned by God, and nor was Elijah.

Many times in our lives, when things seem darker than night, God is watching over us and considers our plight. We might shudder and cry out, but He is still there, ready with His “hand held out still”. This is the reality of predestination... and if it works for us, it also works for the people God originally chose to be His, because He cannot change His mind.

Today, said Paul, the same applies: “there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” This statement confirms what Paul said earlier, that God predestinated the elect amongst the Israelites. A ‘remnant’ is a number left behind, or ‘that which is left’. It is a word used to describe those few saved by God out of apostate Israel. “

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Jesus said He was sent to the "lost sheep" of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Elsewhere, we read of lost sheep being searched-for by the shepherd, Who views them as precious. The lost' sheep are, then, to be found and returned, not cast off. When John the Baptist preached, "many of the children of Israel" turned to God, because He "redeemed His people" (Luke 1:68). Nathanael said to Jesus "thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel". Jesus would not be King of Israel unless Israel were acceptable.

But, does this mean ALL of Israel are accepted by God? No, it does not. Merely being born a Jew is insufficient. Paul spoke of the "hope of Israel". In Romans 9 we saw that "a remnant shall be saved". This has the same meaning as for the rest of mankind. As the New Testament says, they were saved by the same faith that saves us (as it is explained by God in the full extent of 'salvation'). Those who "walk according to this rule" will know peace, including the "Israel of God". Who are these people? They are not all Jews, but a small number, elect by God.

In Hebrews 8:10 we are told: "This (is) the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... and they shall be my people." This new covenant refers to the covenant given by Christ, re verse 13: "a new covenant, he hath made the first old." Thus, some of Israel will be saved. We saw this in Romans 9:6: "They (are) not all Israel, which are of Israel." In other words, just as God has saved some from amongst the gentiles, so He has saved some from amongst the Israelites.

The only benefit of being a Jew, according to Paul, was that they had the glorious advantage of knowing the law of God and everything God had previously said to mankind. How can this be? Because, from the beginning of time to the end, the only way to God is faith, and this is only given to the elect, 'spiritual Israel', not to all.

The word 'remnant' does not, in itself, mean 'small', but it does in this case, for the number of Israel who were saved before Christ was very small compared to the whole nation, and the number saved after Christ was also small compared to the number who made up the nation. That is, they were predestinated to be saved "according to the election of grace". This is very clear. Thus, there are no concessions for Jews. Make no mistake, Paul is saying that Jews are also saved "at this present time" (post-Jesus). Not because they are Jews, but because they are predestinated to salvation.

Verses 6 - 10

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1.

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

2.

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

3.

(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

4.

And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompence unto them:

5.

Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.

Paul goes further, saying that if their salvation was by grace, then their works (religion and its rites) cannot save. If their works and religious zeal could save, then salvation would no longer be something of free grace. Conversely, if they could be saved by their own efforts, then grace no longer exists as something to bring them to salvation.

What all this says, is that the Jewish religion no longer had merit as a way to salvation. There was now a new promise or covenant, through the Messiah and all, whether Jew or gentile, had to be saved under those terms. Thus, though the Jews as a people remain special in God's (as a nation – not as people who need salvation through Christ), they are currently under judgment and must be saved by Christ's sacrifice.

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So, what is the position of the Jews now, asks Paul? He said "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for" - Israel could not reach the goal they had set themselves by human means (religion and works). Rather, a few were saved because God elected them, and "the rest were blinded". This is exactly the same as for Gentiles.

The Jews had been given "a spirit of slumber", so that they could not respond to God, even after Christ had lived and died. Is this not similar to the position of Pharaoh? They were under punishment. As David said – let their own wiles be their undoing, a reward for not obeying the Lord. Let their minds and hearts be black, and let their every work be hard and crushing. This has been the lot of Jews to our modern day, and will remain so until, and if, God removes His judgment upon them.

Verses 11 - 15

1.

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

2.

Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?

3.

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

4.

If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

5.

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

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Now here comes something few Christians can understand. Paul asks if the Jews stumbled so that they could become as nothing. Again, the answer comes back firmly – “God forbid”! Much is spoken against Israel today, not just by the world but also by some Christians. But, here, Paul repeats an amazing truth, that God looks after His own even when they fall into sin. This has been seen previously in other texts. Indeed, it has to be this way, because otherwise we would have no assurance of salvation.

To “stumble” means to be in error, to sin, to be in a wretched state. To “fall” means to descend from a better place to a lower one, to be lost or to perish. Paul says to these conditions “God forbid”. No matter what we think, or what theory we follow, God has His own plans and will follow them!

The reason the Jews fell was that God used it to save Gentiles, “for to provoke them to jealousy”. This is one word in Greek, meaning to cause them to emulate what happened to the Gentiles. It was used as a means of making the Jews suddenly realize what they had lost, and what they can regain by obedience and salvation.

This is not my own interpretation, but that given by scripture itself, as Paul now proves. As he said, if the fall of the Jews meant that salvation was given to the whole world (“the riches of the world... riches of the Gentiles”, how much more riches can be given to everyone if Israel were returned to their former glorious state (“how much more their fullness?”)?

The word ‘diminished’ means a decrease, or loss of salvation. It does not mean totally removed. Hence the use of ‘fulness’... the filling with the presence of Christ, abundance, fulfilling. These are words that refer to a resurgence of what still remains, not a bringing to life of a corpse. Israel, says Paul, is diminished, not dead; knocked out, not killed. Paul must be talking about a future state, because the present state (in his time and to now) is inglorious and under rebuke.

When he says this, Paul is speaking to the gentiles. He is warning the, not to feel smug, that they have what Israel no longer has. He says it as the “apostle of the Gentiles”, doing honour to his office.

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He is speaking thus in the hope that some of his kinsmen may realize their error and return to faith (“provoke to emulation”) and be saved by the Gospel. They could no longer find solace in their rites and religion, for it was now past. Only Jesus could now save them.

For, says Paul, if by being cast away by God, the world received the Gospel to salvation, how much more wonderful would it be for the Jews to return to faith, coming from spiritual deadness to spiritual life?

This is the same message for everyone, regardless of nation. The same need for faith in the Lord runs throughout history. Only the outward means changed, according to God’s plan. The eternal privilege of this is displayed in the next section.

Unfortunately, too many Christians ascribe some kind of magical protection to Israel today. Many become Zionist in belief, though scripture does not demand it. They see all Jews as wondrous and needing Christian support. This is not the case, and is not found in Paul’s words. Rather, he is saying that God has not removed Israel totally, but is keeping them subjugated by punishment, in a kind of lengthy second Babylon experience. As such, they are sinners relying on a religion long banished by Christ’s sacrifice.

Of more interest is that Rome now carries on what Christ removed! They are the new form of apostate Israel! The call is therefore simple, for current Christians – do not smear or denigrate Israel today, but, on the other hand, do not support or praise them, for their beliefs and actions are those of unbelievers. (This is not a political comment).

Verses 16 - 21

1.

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

2.

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

3.

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Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

4.

Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

5.

Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

6.

For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Verse 16 is another way of saying that if the root is good so will be the fruit. Thus, if the 'firstfruit' is holy, so will be the 'lump'. In this text 'firstfruit' means the first, someone superior to all the rest. It is a term taken from Judaistic harvest offerings to God: the first portion of dough from which the sacred loaves were made. It came to mean someone consecrated to God forever. That is, Christ the Messiah. And, if the first dough is good, so is the lump removed from it (because it is from the same dough) to make the sacred loaves; or the holy people of God, Christians.

Thus, if the root is holy, so are the branches. This truth seems to escape most Christians today, who seem unable to discern truth from lies, and liars from genuine believers. I have discussed this fact before... that we must not just discern, but we must act, separating those who are true from those who are false. If we do not we end up with deception and being tolerant towards everything of Satan, especially if it has a veneer of spirituality.

Some branches are broken off: unfaithful Israel. The elect Israelites were at least of the true olive tree, raised by God. But, Gentiles are of a wild olive tree, previously untouched by God. However, now, both the natural branches and the wild branches are grafted to the genuine tree of God (verse 17) and so both enjoy the goodness of the holy root and display the same genuine fruit.

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Because both branches have been grafted into the true root, neither can boast of being more special than the other. If the Gentiles boasted they were somehow superior, this would be proof that they were not genuine, or that they really had the genuine root. The significance of this is that growers always graft the good branch into a bad tree, to try to improve it. But, with God, He grafts a bad branch into the good tree. In this way the branch that was once reliant on a bad root, is made anew and has true nourishment. If a Gentile, then, boasts of his acceptance by God, it shows that he is still owned by the old, bad root, for pride has no place before God.

In this text there is a very important fact concerning the Church: that it began with the chosen people of God, the Israelites. The Gentiles were only grafted in to what God already had given to the Israelites. They had the true root. That is why all others had to be cut away from their old, bad roots, and attached to the true root. Therefore, the 'Church' did not begin after the death of Christ, but well beforehand. The Church is spiritual not physical. Hence spiritual Israel joins with spiritual Gentiles. Between them, they are the Church. This is what chapter 11 of Hebrews tells us!

Some Gentiles concluded that the true branches were cut off so that they could take their place. Paul, however, calls this 'highminded'... proud, arrogant. He tells them that those who were cut off were those who were not elect. They were removed because of their unbelief. In the same way, Gentiles, too, are cast away by God for unbelief. This is another way of saying that many will end up in hell because of unbelief.

So, says Paul, do not be proud of your new estate, for pride will prove your unbelief, and you will end up the same way – cast off. Instead, fear. Fear what? Fear God; be terrified that you will yourself be abandoned by God. Just be grateful that He chose you and you now have eternal life. There is nothing to be boastful about, when God gives the gift of salvation freely and undeserved.

We should all fear God in this respect, because He did not spare those He first chose, the Israelites. This is because He is not a respecter of persons. What matters is belief and obedience. Without these, we will be doomed to hell (verse 21).

Verses 22 - 24

1.

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Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

2.

And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again.

3.

For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?

Therefore, advises Paul, look at the goodness and the severity of God! Today, many Christians think it good to just look at God's love. They completely ignore His 'severity'... His sharpness or 'cutting'. It means He will exact the precise punishment for a statute that has been broken. God is not concerned with who we are, but with what we do and believe. If we believe and obey we are alright. But if not, we are cast away.

Those of Israel who 'fell' (disobeyed) were treated severely. But, to Gentiles who believed and obeyed, He shows goodness. There is a proviso: on condition that they remained holy. If they did not, they, too, would be cut off. Do not mistake what is being said. This does NOT mean we can lose our salvation. It means that the Israelites enjoyed special status as God's chosen people. Only those who were faithful were saved. The rest were cast off, because they were not elect. Same goes for Gentiles.

Some amongst them will be saved, because of election. The meaning is that Gentiles were given salvation because the Jews as a nation were unfaithful. The same will happen to the Gentiles (defined as all non-Jews) if they resort back to evil. This will occur soon, if we observe what is now happening in the world.

Paul reverses it now, by saying that, similarly, if formerly unrepentant Jews have faith (because they are elect), God will again graft them back into His root. This is the root of the Church. After

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all, says Paul, if God should graft a bad olive branch into the good tree, how much more wonderful would it be for God to again accept back to His tree, His chosen people who were once unrepentant? No doubt the father of the prodigal son was kind to strangers, but how much more joyous he was when the son returned! It is true that some Christians fall away into sin. But, God will welcome them back as new if they repent and change!

Verses 25 - 27

1.

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

2.

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

3.

For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Paul did not want his fellow believers to be ignorant of these facts, though we cannot possibly understand all that God does for the ungodly. He wants the Gentiles to realize how wonderful is their salvation, so that they do not boast. Today, many Christian groups boast about their supposed 'better' condition before God, not understanding that their very boast is an indication of their spiritual poverty!

Indeed, says Paul, Israel will be blind until the "fullness of the Gentiles be come in". This language immediately tells us that Israel as a nation will not be left in darkness and will one day return to some kind of rightness with God. Notice that this blindness is only "in part". In part, *meros*, means a portion assigned to them by God, their 'destiny'. It also means a portion of the whole. So, not *all* Israel is cast off... only the unfaithful.

The term 'fullness' is a nautical term for a ship filled with personnel and freight. In this text, it is

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used to describe Gentiles who have been filled to the brim with Christ's blessings. Another meaning is that the Gentiles are a patch sewn onto an older garment. The words "be come in", eiserchomai, means in this text to come into being, publicly.

So, what do they words really mean? They mean that Israel will remain 'out in the cold' until the 'fullness of the Gentiles' has been arrived at publicly. It all points to the fact that Israel has not been cast off forever, but will one day return to favour. This may not be liked by certain who have a theoretical stance towards scripture, but it is true anyway!

The structure of the words means that this return to favour must occur in time, before the end comes. The 'fullness' refers to the time when the majority of Gentiles will have 'filled the gap' left by the faithless Israelites. Bear in mind that only a specific number will be saved throughout time. Arminians (and Romanists – both being virtually the same) think they can save any number, but this is not possible because it is against holy declaration. If God says (as He does) that only the elect will be saved, and that He has already chosen who these elect will be, it stands to reason that the number is fixed.

Thus, the text means that a time will come when most Gentiles will have been saved and their prominence as the faithful will be ended. Looking at the present evils amongst Gentiles, made very public, that time of 'fulfillment' is coming soon. Then, God will receive more Israelites, again returning them from a place of exile. This is what the text tells us.

"And so all Israel shall be saved"! (Verse 26: 'All' means 'many'). The Deliverer, Christ, will provide salvation from Heaven to many Israelites at that time, turning large numbers from their former ungodliness. Why? Because He has decreed it in a promise (covenant). He said "I will take away their sins". This day is coming whether or not some accept or believe it!

Verses 28 - 32

1.

As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

2.

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

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3.

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

4.

Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

5.

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

But, for the moment, says Paul, they are “enemies for your sakes”. That is, they will not listen and thus act against God’s word. Even so, he says, “as touching the election, they are beloved for the father’s sakes.” God promised Isaac and the patriarchs that the numbers of the chosen nation would be like sand on a seashore; unable to be counted because there are so many. Those Jews who are elect are just as beloved as any who are elect amongst the Gentiles. This is because “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” God cannot ignore His own promises!

He chose the elect before time began and will not go back on His choices. In past time, God says, Gentiles did not believe God, but they have now been shown mercy, through the Jews, despite their unbelief. In the same way (verse 31) those Jews who did not believe are now preached the Gospel by Gentiles, whose ministry will save some. After all, says Paul, God enshrouded all men in unbelief, whether Jew or Gentile, to show that all men require the same free grace from God to be saved. Jew or Gentile, it makes no difference! All are saved in the same way, by God’s grace. Same sinners; same Church!

Verses 33 - 36

1.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

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2.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

3.

Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

4.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Paul now praises God for His mercy and riches in Heaven. God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond the understanding of mere human beings, who are unable to find out why God acts as He does (unless He tells us). We simply cannot find out what He is doing (unless He tells us). So, if you do not understand why the Israelites remain special to God, do not ask me... only God knows! None of us, even the most exalted of theologians, can understand what God does not reveal. And, certainly, no mere man can counsel God! We can say, however, that one reason is that God keeps His word, and He makes good all His promises.

And, says Paul, who gives anything back to God and has not been rewarded manifold for their faith? Do we truly realize that we give up nothing for God and whatever service we perform is only our just due? Though it is only what God demands in the first place, He still rewards us for being faithful. I cannot understand this, but it does not matter. If God says it, I believe it. So, Christian, do not dare to say you give anything to God. Whatever you do is only what is expected. Just be grateful that God allows you to do it.

"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things"!! He creates everything good and sustains everything. It all comes from Him and returns to Him, because everything good is 'in Him' anyway. He owns all and we owe Him everything; He owes us nothing. It is to God that glory is owed forever. Amen – so be it.

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