

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 11:7-10

Study Notes:

- **A theology of Israel's Current Dilemma.**

Summarizing Paul's argument: Not all people born into Jewish families are the "True Israel". In addition, "Not many" accepted the Gospel, but those who did accept it had to do it by faith. Grace had to be the basis of their salvation ... because the works of the Law were not able to justify them before God.

- **The Primary Question:**

"How can Paul apply this "remnant" concept to how God is dealing with the people of Israel?"

By stating that there is a "true Israel" and only a "remnant" has accepted the Gospel, Paul has moved from broad statements to a virtual separation. He is now identifying saved Jews as opposed to unbelieving Jews.

Did Paul invent this theology of a remnant or is there evidence for it elsewhere?

Jesus' words in Matthew 21:

"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." – See: Matthew 21:28-32

- **Israel Was Hardened:**

Paul's statement in verse 7: "What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened..."

Paul reflects back to what he previously said about Egypt's Pharaoh. After God gave him repeated opportunities to repent, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart".

A parallel: God repeatedly called the Jews back to himself. Each call was rejected. What eventually happened? They hardened their hearts ... and God hardened their hearts.

Paul expands on this in verse 8: "As it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."

The Jews' stubbornness led to their own hardening – and eventually they simply couldn't see or hear what God was telling them.

- **Two Old Testament Proofs:**

- Deuteronomy 29:

Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear.

Moses reminds the Israelites that they saw all the miracles God did to set them free from Egypt. Even so, they lack "a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear."

Two possible interpretations: 1. God intentionally has kept Israel from seeing and hearing the truth behind the miracles. 2. Because of their

continual rebellion, God has not allowed them to see and hear these truths.

- Isaiah 29:10: "The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes; he has covered your heads."

The Isaiah context: Isaiah is speaking hundreds of years after Moses' words – and reflects a people who still have not yielded. Eventually, God "gave them a spirit of stupor."

Isaiah: Israel has entered a state where they have experienced a loss of "spiritual sensitivity". They cannot hear the Word of God; they cannot see the spiritual truths.

- **Two More Proofs: vv. 9-10**

Paul continues quoting the Old Testament to make his point about Israel's self-hardening. This time he quotes the Davidic psalms, specifically Psalm 69.

Psalm 69 was adopted by first century Christians as a Messianic prophecy: "Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me." – Psalm 69:4

Paul actually reverses the story line: In the original text, David, representing Israel, complains about being the victim of hostility. In Romans 11, Paul reverses the story: Israel, who was formerly persecuted now becomes Christ's persecutor by rejecting his Message.

The primary statement: "May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see...". Paul combines the quotes from Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

- **The Point:**

Israel, who saw God's miracles, became blind to God's Message. Israel, who heard God's Word, became deaf to it. Israel, who saw and heard Jesus' Ministry, became deaf and blind to the gospel. But it was self-inflicted.

- **A Second Major Question: v. 11**

“Again, I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?” -v.11

Two important verbs: “stumble” and “fall”. The question: “Is Israel beyond recovery?”

An important distinction: We can think of Israel as a nation or we can think of Israel as the collective of Jewish people – in other words, the “sum of the parts”.

Paul has been describing Israel in both ways. He's told us that not all Israel is true Israel. He's made it clear that just being born into a Jewish family did not make someone an authentic Israelite. But he's also made several references to the nation of Israel. He has argued that God is not done with the Jewish people as a nation – even though individual Jews may not have accepted Christ.

The current status of the Jews versus the nation of Israel: God has made certain promises about Israel as a nation – that will come to pass regardless of what individual Jews may or may not do.

On an individual basis, all people must come to Christ to be saved:

- Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 4:12: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Paul's initial question was whether or not God had totally rejected his people. Paul insisted God has not done this ... but allowed Israel's self-hardening to occur.

Still, he argues that there is a remnant of Israel among those who have accepted the Gospel. There is a "believing remnant", but there is a larger group of those who remained hardened.

This has been and continues to be the case. A recent study by the Pew Research Institute:

"Christians currently make up just 2% of Israel's adult population. As of 2010, Christians made up a small share (4%) of the population in the Middle East-North Africa region as a whole."

Although God has not entirely rejected the nation of Israel, the vast majority – some 98% in Israel alone – remain hardened.

Paul's overarching question: "Is the future of Israel hopeless?"

That is what we see next time.