

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 10:16-21

Study Notes:

Paul's argument about sharing the gospel in reverse verb order:

- Christ sends heralds
- Heralds preach
- People hear
- Hearers believe
- Believers call
- Those who call are saved.

The Questions of Evangelism:

- How can they call on the one they have not believed in?
- And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
- And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
- And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?

The prevailing question: What will happen to the Jews and how do the Gentiles and Jews relate in this worldwide progression of evangelism?

- **“Not All” – “Very Few”: v. 16**

“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”

The Greek words Paul uses for “not all” is better translated, “only a few”. It's the same words he used in Romans 9:6 when he wrote, “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel”. In other words, he said, “Only a few who are descended from Israel are Israel”

John amplifies this thought about Jesus' reception in John 1:9-12:

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

A clear analysis of what happened when God sent His Son: "The world did not recognize him". What would have prepared the Gentiles to recognize Him?

- Who had Scriptures?
- Who had the Covenant?
- Who had the Miracles?
- Who had the Prophets?

John: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him"? Greek verbiage: "They rejected him".

How is Israel's unbelief to be explained?"

A great insight from John Stott: "The Jewish response-or rather non-response—to the gospel."

- By not deciding about the gospel, they were deciding.
- By not responding, they were responding.

Example: Mark 1:21 – The Jewish audience was "amazed at his teaching". The Greek language: The crowd thought, "Wow, great sermon, Jesus", – but they didn't decide anything.

- **Isaiah's Prediction of Israel's Unbelief:**

“For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” The original context of that question - Isaiah 53:1-4:

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

Hundreds of years before Christ's birth, Isaiah saw what would happen: The Messiah would come to his own people – but by not deciding – they rejected him.

Israel should have believed. They had every bit of information needed. They knew every piece of biographical information necessary to recognize Jesus was the Messiah.

- **Preaching, Hearing, and Believing.**

Verses 16 and 17: “But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Three activities in verse 17: Preaching, Hearing, and Believing. A herald tells the gospel, people hear the gospel, and people must believe the gospel.

The real question about Israel: “Have they heard **and** believed?”

Hearing the Word of God and believing the Word of God are not the same thing: At one point, Jesus' audience in his own hometown synagogue remarked about how gracious his words were. Minutes later, they pushed him out of the synagogue, down the street, and tried to shove him off a cliff!

"... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." There is something significantly deeper in that verse than just listening. The message has the power to save, but only if the hearer believes.

How can Paul explain how so many ultimately rejected Christ's message and his Messianic mission?

Verses 18 & 19: Paul asks two questions – borrowed from other scriptures – and uses them as evidence for Israel's purposeful rejection of the Gospel. After that, he will offer his own explanation for their unbelief.

- **Question # 1: "Did they not hear?" (v. 18)**

Verse 18: "But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course, they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

"Did Israel hear Jesus' message?" Absolutely! His message was preached to them and they heard it.

Paul's supporting passage: Psalm 19: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

John Stott: "Paul's choice of biblical quotation is surprising, since what Psalm 19 celebrates is not the worldwide spread of the gospel, but the universal witness of the heavens to their Creator." – John Stott

Psalm 19 in its original context: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. 3 They have no

speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”
– Psalm 19:1-4

Paul quotes David's words about creation as an eloquent description of God's general revelation to the world and applies a parallel to the gospel being preached. Just as the heavens declare God's glory to the whole earth – the gospel will spread to the whole world.

Paul's quotation of Psalm 19 answers the question, “Did Israel not hear?”, but it does more than that: The gospel came to the Jewish nation: Wherever there were Jews, the message was preached.

The underlying point: The Jews cannot claim that they had not heard the gospel. Their lack of believing was not due to their lack of hearing.

- **Question # 2: “Did Israel not understand?”**

Paul may well be considering the point that it is possible for Israel to have heard the message without understanding. Jesus alluded to this possibility in the parable of the sower.

But after raising the question, Paul immediately rejects this explanation for the Jews unbelief. First, he does this by quoting Moses. Then he quotes a second passage in Isaiah. He does this so that the Law and the Prophets will both act as witnesses.

The first quote - Deuteronomy 32:21:

“They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.” – Deuteronomy 32:21

This is a portion of what is known as “The Song of Moses” - a prophecy given by Moses before he died, predicting Israel's future falling away and the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's kingdom.

Paul chose this passage because it addresses the question, “Did Israel not understand?” Moses speaks for God and predicts that a people with no understanding will be used to anger Israel.

The Jews cannot be the “people that has no understanding”. In fact, they prided themselves on being the one people who did understand God’s Law. They prided themselves on being the one people God had chosen. The only remaining candidate for the group is the Gentiles.

A Reversal of fortunes: A people who were not a people became God’s people. A “no nation”, “no understanding” people, became a part of the kingdom – while Israel was self-alienated.

A second quote from Isaiah’s prophecy about the Gentiles:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’

2 All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—3 a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick;

4 who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of impure meat; 5 who say, ‘Keep away; don’t come near me, for I am too sacred for you!’

Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day.”

Isaiah’s words are a truly sad commentary on not only the unbelief, but the rebellion of God’s Jewish People.

God declares, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed

myself to those who did not ask for me.” Again, it's the ultimate reversal. Israel who heard the gospel, Israel who understood the message, rejected it. The Gentiles, who neither the background nor the understanding embraced it.

- **“A Stubborn and Obstinate People”**

As Paul rounds out this chapter, he makes one more reference to Isaiah's prediction. This reference doesn't ask any questions. Instead, it states quite clearly God's own explanation for Israel's unbelief.

“I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” But concerning Israel he says, **“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”**

While Paul has rejected the objection that Israel didn't hear the gospel message, or didn't understand it, he accepts a third explanation for their unbelief: Israel's stubbornness.

If you raised children, what did you feel when you stretched out your hands to pick up your toddler or hug them, and they refused?

God says, “All day long I have held out my hands...”. It's a euphemism for God's historical relationship with the Chosen People. He stretched out his hands and they shrank back. They were both disobedient and obstinate.

What did Jesus say as he overlooked the city of Jerusalem?

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” – Luke 13:34

That was God's view of Israel in the Old Testament. That was Jesus' view of Israel when he came to his own people. In the centuries between those statements, nothing had changed.

- Did Israel not hear the message? They certainly did.
- Did Israel not understand the message? They certainly did.

They are guilty on both counts. The real answer is they were “disobedient and obstinate”.

The “Chosen People” were (self) disqualified through their disobedience and obstinate attitudes. On the other hand, the Gentiles were brought into the kingdom of God.

What will become of the Jews? Paul gives us the answer to that in chapter 11.