

**Romans 11:1-10**  
**June 14, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

I don't recall resisting God when it came to salvation. In fact, my memory of it is that it came rather easily. [Share my testimony of making a decision for Christ at age 10...Blessed to be born into a Christian home, loving environment, afforded every opportunity to learn about God and Jesus, and arrived with child-like faith...] But my story may not mirror some of yours.

Q: Is there anyone here who found yourself resisting God's salvation before you made a decision for Christ? [See if there are people willing to tell their story. Listen for people who gave them HOPE]

Q [If no testimonies]: If someone is rebelling or resisting God, what approach do you think is most effective – give that person a message of condemnation, or a message of hope? [HOPE!]

We all need hope. When life hits us hard and things aren't going well, the last thing we need are people in our lives who are critical of us, or who are indifferent, or unsympathetic. What we need is HOPE. We need to know that life can be better, richer, and more purposeful with the help of God.

**Transition:** Today we pick up where Paul, the writer of Romans, left us. He has already reminded the Israelites that they have rejected God by rejecting Jesus, they rejected salvation by faith, and even the prophets had predicted their rejection and rebellion. But Paul has a very strong message of hope to the Israelite people: God has a future for them as His chosen people.

A certain phrase kept coming to mind as I putting this lesson together, and it was "The door is always open. He will always leave the light on."

Q: Does anyone know who Tom Bodett is? [He's the NPR "All Things Considered" radio personality who was known for his warm and folksy voice style. When Motel 6 needed someone to help promote their brand as a low-cost alternative to the more upscale hotels, they chose Tom to do the ad. Here is the jingle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SdgOevV5kY> God does the same. He leaves the light on so that everyone can see that His door of salvation is always open.]

So for today, I want us to consider that all of us CAN give hope to those who are resisting God's salvation BY sharing the TRUTHS about God's character. We are surrounded by people who need hope, and we are called to be God's vessel to share how they can have hope through salvation in Christ Jesus. But on what basis can someone have hope? As His ambassadors, we want them to know the TRUTHS about God, His character. Because He never changes, we want others to know why the door of salvation is always open and that His light will always be on.

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 11:1-10]**

V.1:

- I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

V.2:

- God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel:

V.3:

- “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”?

V.4:

- And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

V.5:

- So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

V.6:

- And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

V.7:

- What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,

V.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.”

V.9:

- And David says: “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

V.10:

- May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.”

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.1: Did God reject His chosen people? [“By no means!”]

Q v.2-6: Paul gives two proofs that God did not reject His chosen people. What was the first proof? [Paul said, “Look at me!” He had responded by faith to Jesus and rec'd God's righteousness, and yet he was an Israelite. If God could save Paul, He certainly could save other Jews.]

Q v.2-6: What was the second proof Paul gave? [He gave the story of Elijah, who appealed to God against Israel. Elijah believed he was the only Israelite left, and they were trying to kill him.]

Q: What was God's answer to Elijah? [God had reserved for Himself a remnant in Israel that numbered 7,000.]

Q v.5: How was the remnant chosen? [By God's grace] Paul was an example of a "remnant of that present time." In every generation of the church "a remnant chosen by grace" has been called from among the Jews.

Q v.7: What was Israel so earnestly trying to obtain? [Salvation by works]

Observation: Paul uses the word "hardened" in v.7, and you may be thinking "Here we go again. Did God harden their hearts such that they wouldn't be a part of the elect? "Hardened is an interesting term. Since the entire point of 9:30–10:3 and 10:16–21 is that Israel was responsible for its rejection of God's salvation despite the prophets' best efforts to call them to repentance, Paul did not mean that God predestined them to stubbornness. If God Himself hardened some Jews' hearts so they could not believe, then it makes no sense for God to say through Isaiah, "I spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in the wrong path, following their own thoughts" (Rm 10:21; Is 65:2).]

Commentary v.9: Their "table to become a snare" means that their blessings turn into burdens and judgments; the very things which were to be a source of nourishment and blessing to Israel became the occasion for their rejection of God and God's judgment on them.

App Q: In light of these last ten verses, what TRUTHS have we learned about God that would give hope to someone who is resisting God? Why should they believe the door is always open and the light will always be left on?

- God is faithful to His covenant with Abraham
- God's love for His chosen people never changed just because the Israelites rebelled.
- God gives people the freedom to drift away from Him, but they can always turn back.
- God operates by grace.

**LOOK:**

Pray that the Lord would show each of us someone in our circle of influence who is resisting God, and let's be prepared to give them hope based on the character of God.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 550–551). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## **GOD IS NOT THROUGH WITH ISRAEL!**

### *Romans 11*

For centuries people have been puzzled by the nation of Israel. The Roman government recognized the Jewish religion, but it still called the nation *secta nefaria*—"a nefarious sect." The great historian Arnold Toynbee classified Israel as "a fossil civilization" and did not know what to do with it. For some reason, the nation did not fit into his historical theories.

Paul devoted all of Romans 11 to presenting proof that God is not through with Israel. We must not apply this chapter to the church today, because Paul is discussing a literal future for a literal nation. He called five witnesses to prove there was a future in God's plan for the Jews.

### **Paul Himself (Rom. 11:1)**

"Hath God cast away His people? God forbid! For I also am an Israelite!" If God has cast away His people, then how can the conversion of the Apostle Paul be explained? The fact that his conversion is presented three times in the Book of Acts is significant (Acts 9, 22, 26). Certainly Dr. Luke did not write these chapters and repeat the story just to exalt Paul. No, they were written to show Paul's conversion as an illustration of the future conversion of the nation of Israel. Paul called himself "one born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8). In 1 Timothy 1:16 he stated that God saved him "that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

The accounts of Paul's conversion tell very little that parallels our salvation experience today. Certainly none of us has seen Christ in glory or actually heard Him speak from heaven. We were neither blinded by the light of heaven nor thrown to the ground. In what way, then, is Paul's conversion "a pattern"? It is a picture of how the nation of Israel will be saved when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. The details of Israel's future restoration and salvation are given in Zechariah 12:10–13:1. The nation shall see Him as He returns (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7), recognize Him as their Messiah, repent, and receive Him. It will be an experience similar to that of Saul of Tarsus when he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9).

This is why Paul used himself as the first witness. The *fact* that he was saved does not prove that there is a future for Israel. Rather, what is important is the *way* he was saved.

### **The Prophet Elijah (Rom. 11:2–10)**

Israel is God's elect nation; He foreknew them, or chose them, and they are His. The fact that most of the nation has rejected Christ is no proof that God has finished with His people. In his day, Elijah thought that the nation had totally departed from God (see 1 Kings 19). But Elijah discovered that there was yet a remnant of true believers. He thought he was the only faithful Jew left and discovered that there were 7,000 more.

Paul referred to this “remnant” in Romans 9:27, a quotation from Isaiah 10:22–23. At no time has the entire nation of Israel been true to the Lord. God makes a distinction between Abraham’s natural children and his spiritual children (Rom. 2:25–29). The fact that the Jews shared in the covenant by being circumcised did not guarantee their salvation. Like Abraham, they had to believe God in order to receive His righteousness (Rom. 4:1–5).

Note that this remnant is saved by grace and not by works (Rom. 11:5–6). Note also the parallel in Romans 9:30–33. It is impossible to mix grace and works, for the one cancels the other. Israel’s main concern had always been in trying to please God with good works (Rom. 9:30–10:4). The nation refused to submit to Christ’s righteousness, just as religious, self-righteous people refuse to submit today.

If a remnant had been saved, thus proving that God was not through with His people, then what had happened to the rest of the nation? They had been hardened (a better translation than “blinded” in Rom. 11:7). This was the result of their resisting the truth, just as Pharaoh’s heart was hardened because he resisted the truth. Paul quoted Isaiah 29:10 to support his statement, and also referred to Deuteronomy 29:4. We would expect a pagan ruler to harden himself against the Lord, but we do not expect God’s people to do so.

Romans 11:9–10 are cited from Psalm 69:22–23. This psalm is one of the most important of the messianic psalms and is referred to several times in the New Testament. Note especially Romans 11:4, 9, 21–22. Their “table to become a snare” means that their blessings turn into burdens and judgments. This is what happened to Israel: their spiritual blessings should have led them to Christ, but instead they became a snare that kept them from Christ. Their very religious practices and observances became substitutes for the real experience of salvation. Sad to say, this same mistake is made today when people depend on religious rituals and practices instead of trusting in the Christ who is pictured in these activities.

Paul made it clear that the hardening of Israel is neither total nor final, and this is proof that God has a future for the nation. “Hardness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). The existence of the believing Jewish remnant today, as in Elijah’s day, is evidence that God still has a plan for His people. Paul did not imitate Elijah’s mistake and say, “I only am left!” He knew that there was a remnant of Israel in this world who trusted God.

**Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 482–483). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### *C. God’s sovereign choice fulfilled (chap. 11)*

To this point in this major section of Romans (chaps. 9–11) God’s personal righteousness and His provided righteousness for people has been displayed primarily in Israel’s rejecting Christ and rebelling against God, and in God’s choosing and turning to Gentiles in grace. These themes continue in this chapter, but God’s sovereign choice also involves His restoring Israel and His being magnified thereby.

#### 1. IN ELECTION OF GRACE (11:1–10).

11:1–6. Paul’s transition from chapter 10 is seen in the repetition of his rhetorical clause “I ask” (10:18–19). **I ask then** is literally, “Therefore, I say.” The apostle’s question is, **Did God**

**reject His people?** In Greek the question is asked to elicit a negative reply: “God did not reject His people, did He?” This is reinforced by Paul’s characteristic negative ejaculation, **By no means!** (*mē genoito*; cf. comments on 3:4) Then Paul presented himself as his first proof. He had responded by faith to Jesus Christ and had received God’s provided righteousness, and yet he was **an Israelite** (cf. Phil. 3:5) and of **the tribe of Benjamin**. Though small, Benjamin was a significant tribe (Saul, Israel’s first king, was from Benjamin). If God could save Paul (Acts 9; 22; 26), He certainly could save other Jews (1 Tim. 1:15–16). Then he positively declared, **God did not reject His people** (quoted from 1 Sam. 12:22; Ps. 94:14), **whom He foreknew** (*proegnō*, “had a meaningful relationship with”; cf. Amos 3:2; and cf. comments on Rom. 8:29). God had chosen Israel as His covenant people from eternity past and entered into a relationship with them that will never be destroyed (cf. Jer. 31:37).

Paul’s second proof that God has not rejected His people was taken from Israel’s history during Elijah’s ministry. The prophet was deeply depressed, having fled for his life from Jezebel. Paul said, **Elijah ... appealed to** (*entynchanei*, “petitioned”; trans. “intercedes” in Rom. 8:27 and “is ... interceding” in 8:34) **God against Israel**. Paul then quoted part of the prophet’s complaint (1 Kings 19:10, 14), reversing the order of the details quoted and concluding with Elijah’s lament, **I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me**. Elijah considered himself the only believing person left in Israel. Paul asked, **And what was God’s answer** (lit., “the divine response”) **to him?** God was not limited to one fearful, depressed prophet; He had **reserved for Himself** a godly remnant in Israel that numbered **7,000** (1 Kings 19:18). The preservation of the faithful remnant was a work of God.

After the historical illustration Paul drew a conclusion for his day: **So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace** (lit., “a remnant according to the election of grace has come to be”). Paul was only one of many in his generation elected to faith from the people of Israel. In every generation of the church “a remnant chosen by grace” has been called from among the Jews. Paul added that this choice is totally **by God’s grace** (cf. Eph. 2:8–9) and he emphasized the antithesis between **grace** and **works** (cf. Rom. 4:4–5; 9:30–32).

11:7–10. Paul then discussed what “a remnant chosen by grace” out of **Israel** meant for the people as a whole. The situation was ironic. The Jews zealously sought to be accepted by God on the basis of works and the righteousness of the Law (cf. 10:2–3). However, they were not accepted by God; only **the elect** were, because of God’s sovereign choice by grace. **The others were hardened** (cf. 11:25). What it means to be hardened is seen from Paul’s explanatory and supporting quotations. The first is taken from both Deuteronomy 29:3–4 and Isaiah 29:10, and indicates that hardening involves spiritual drowsiness (**stupor** is the rendering of *katanyxeōs*, “a numbness resulting from a sting”), blindness, and deafness (cf. Isa. 6:9–10). The second quotation (in Rom. 11:9–10) is of Psalm 69:22–23, which predicts that the very things which should have been the source of nourishment and blessing to Israel (**table** means their blessings from the hand of God, which should have led them to Christ; cf. Gal. 3:24) became the occasion for their rejection of God (**a snare and a trap, a stumbling block**; cf. Rom. 9:32–33) and God’s judgment (**retribution**) on them. Because they refused to receive God’s truth (cf. Isa. 6:9–10; John 5:40) **their backs will be bent** under the weight of guilt and punishment **forever**.

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1698). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**11:7–8** Though most Jews have rejected the message of salvation in Jesus, a remnant within the total population—the elect—did obtain salvation (vv. 5–6). The rest were “hardened”—a curious term. Since the entire point of 9:30–10:3 and 10:16–21 is that Israel was responsible for its rejection of God’s salvation despite the prophets’ best efforts to call them to repentance, Paul did not mean that God determined their obstinacy. If God Himself hardened some Jews’ hearts so they could not believe, it makes no sense for God to say through Isaiah, “I spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in the wrong path, following their own thoughts” (Rm 10:21; Is 65:2). This passage from Isaiah that Paul cited goes on to castigate Israel for provoking God and repudiating His laws.

Other uses of the hardening metaphor (a calcifying or callous-building effect) often make clear that hardening of the heart is a self-induced state (e.g., Mt 13:15; Mk 6:52; 8:17; 2 Co 3:14). Even the explicit statement that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart follows a series of events showing that Pharaoh was hardening his own heart (Ex 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34–35; 1 Sm 6:6; cp. Ex 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:8). Therefore, though God may indeed solidify people’s resolve to reject the truth, apparently He does so because they have first resolved themselves to do so. God does not harden hearts that would otherwise have been responsive to Him. Jesus’ quotation of Is 6:9–10 made this very point (Mt 13:14–15).