

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY & MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY – Chapters 9-11

LESSON 38 – GOD’S RIGHTEOUS REMNANT – Romans 11:1-10

Many people today believe God no longer has a plan for His chosen people...the Jews. However, we will see in this lesson as well as the rest of chapter 11, that the Word of God doesn’t support this belief. We are reminded here of God’s unfailing love for Israel.

The key issue in Romans 9-11 is God’s covenant promises to Israel and their refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah. In chapter 9 we saw that God is sovereign and can do what He wants, then in chapter 10 we learned that His will is expressed through the free will of mankind. So God has a sovereign plan for Israel that is being worked out by their choices...the good and the bad.

In this lesson we will see Israel’s situation described in four terms...Blindness...Stupor...Darkness...and then Blindness again. While some Jews are Christians today, most of Israel is blind and walking in darkness and stupor regarding Jesus. It will not always be this way of course, but for the moment it is not a good situation spiritually for Israel.

Paul starts chapter 11 by asking this question about Israel, “Did God reject his people?” The answer is an emphatic NO. Paul explains this by using himself as an example.

The Inquiry of Paul

Paul raised this question earlier in Romans and we will see in our next lesson that he mentions it again in verse 11. It is a good question since he has stressed that the covenant promises of God belong to Israel. Still...Jesus came to His own and they did not receive Him (John 1:11). So how is this resolved? God promised spiritual blessing to Israel but they are walking in spiritual darkness. God will always keep His promises to Israel. This is important for us to remember because it shows that we can always trust Him to keep His promises to us.

The Insistence of Paul

Paul doesn’t hesitate in answering His own question. In fact, he uses very strong language when he says, “By no means!” This is actually the strongest negative phrase in the Greek language. It means absolutely not! Paul uses this phrase ten times in the book of Romans to correct misunderstandings. Paul wants us to know in no uncertain terms, that God has not turned His back on His chosen people Israel.

The Illustrations of Paul

Paul Uses Himself – Has God rejected the Jews? Paul answers this by saying, “Look at me. Do I look rejected to you?” Paul was a Jew. You couldn’t get any more Jewish than Paul.

If God had rejected the Jews then Paul would have been one of the first to go given his background of persecuting the church. But Paul was safe and secure within the blessings of God as a believer in Jesus.

Paul Uses History – In verses 2-6 Paul uses the story of Elijah to demonstrate how God always keeps a believing remnant within Israel. The prophets of Baal were making life difficult for Elijah and in a contest of deities, God defeated Baal. Because of this, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah. So he fled to Mount Horeb and hid in a cave where God challenged him. Elijah thought he was the only

prophet...maybe even the only believer...left in Israel. God set him straight by telling him there were 7000 men who haven't bowed down to Baal. God had kept a significant number of believers in Israel.

We think of a remnant as a leftover piece of carpet or cloth but in the Old Testament, it usually referred to a small group of Jews who survived invasions or captivities. The remnant is the believing minority that is offset by a blinded majority. That is exactly the situation Israel is in today. One of the most difficult witnessing challenges a Christian can face is sharing the Gospel with a religious Jew. They simply do not want to hear about Jesus being the Messiah.

There are several important points to note about Israel's spiritual condition...

1. The search of the nation of Israel – The word blinded used here actually means hardened or calloused. So a blinded person is a person who has become hardened against God's revelation of Himself through Jesus the Messiah. This term is used throughout the New Testament to describe not only the Jews but anyone who is an unbeliever. When something is hard like stone it means there is no ability to sense or feel. That is the way the hardened heart responds to the things of God...without feeling or sensibility.
2. The stupor of the nation of Israel – The word for stupor used by Paul here in chapter 11 is very rare in the New Testament. It means to be insensitive or sluggish. It implies that Israel was unable to respond to or recognize righteousness or spiritual truth at all. Because they rejected the Messiah and God's revelation, God sent a spirit of stupor on them...giving them up to their own unbelief.

People who sit in churches and hear the Bible taught week after week without responding to it gradually develop calloused hearts. They begin to live in a type of stupor that makes them unresponsive to the things of God. It is a dangerous place to be and it is where Israel was when Paul wrote his letter and where they are today.

3. The snare of the nation of Israel – In verse 9 Paul quotes Psalm 69:22, "May their table become a snare and a trap..." The feasts and sacrifices described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy eventually became a snare for Israel. They got so involved in the rituals and externals of the sacrifices, they lost the sense of the presence of God. They were going through the motions but it meant nothing to them.

We face the same danger in our own worship. We can completely lose sight of the One we are there to fellowship with and worship. At that point, our services become a snare and a trap for us. Judas at the Last Supper is a great example. He was there, sitting close to Jesus, but with a heart full of sin and deceit. He was just going through the motions.

Paul is trying to help his readers understand that Israel was blind...in a stupor. The purpose of everything they knew and practiced was to lead them to Jesus but this did not happen. Remember Paul said earlier in Romans that they had zeal without knowledge? The same thing can happen to us if we are not careful. Our religious activity can become a snare. When we exclude Jesus from our spiritual life, we find ourselves in the danger that Israel did. The blindness, stupor and entrapment of the Jews broke Paul's heart because he had been there himself.

4. The slavery of the nation of Israel – Paul continues the quotation from Psalm 69, adding verse 23, “May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.”

The bowing of the back is obviously a picture of the 400 years Israel spent in Egypt as slaves. In the book of Revelation we learn that during the Tribulation, Israel will again suffer oppression. That second half of the Tribulation is a time of persecution of Israel. After that period, Jeremiah tells us that Israel will be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7). A day is coming when the Jews will leave behind their blindness and stupor and break free from their snares. They will look upon Jesus and see Him as He really is...their Messiah.

“Did God reject His people? By no means!” There is a minority...a remnant...who believed in Paul’s day and a remnant who continues to believe today. One day that number will explode as God pours out His grace on His chosen people.