

Has God Failed?

Romans 9-11

INTRODUCTION: Jews make up about (2/10s) two-tenths of (1%) one percent of the world's population, roughly 15 million people out of nearly 8 billion. In the United States, they are about 2.4 percent of the population, some 7.5 million people. And yet:

- At least 221 Jewish men and women have received the Nobel Prize since 1901; about 22 percent of the individuals who have ever won one were Jews.
- 36 percent of all American Nobel recipients have been Jewish.
- 25 percent of the Nobel laureates in Physics have been Jewish, 26 percent in Physiology or Medicine, and roughly 40 percent in Economics.
- Six of the first thirteen undisputed world chess champions were Jewish.
- 31 percent of the Pulitzer Prize winners for Drama have been Jewish.
- 41 percent of the Academy Award winners for Best Original Screenplay have been Jewish.
- 42 percent of the Academy Award winners for Best Original Song have been Jewish.
- 30 percent of the figures profiled in the standard reference Thinkers of the Twentieth Century were Jewish.
- And of the hundred most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century, about 40 percent were Jewish.

A people who are two-tenths of one percent of the earth have carried something like a fifth of its highest honors.

BIBLE: That is not even to mention the chief contribution of the Bible - 64 of the 66 books were written by Jewish authors. Can you imagine the secondary and tertiary impact of the 10 Commandments on Western Civilization?

The concept of a Monotheistic view of God as an Immense, personal being that cannot be represented by an idol of which the creation is not a part of, but rather because of - the knowledge of this transcendent, intelligent, personal, singular God came from the JEWS. ***God's promise to Abraham that in your descendants all of the earth shall be blessed - is most certainly true.***

And yet the Jewish people, by and large, are in direct opposition to a faith that is in large part of their own making. Why? The next three chapters of Romans are given to answer that question.

Scripture is always relevant, but perhaps this particular portion of Scripture has never been more relevant than it is today. Americans are as divided over Israel as they have ever been:

PODCASTERS: As a podcaster, I have to keep up with what other people in the field are talking about - nothing gets clicks more than a debate on Israel. Thus, Israel has

become a favorite subject for people like Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, Ben Shapiro, and Megyn Kelly. Even Joe Rogan and Kid Rock engaged in a significant argument over Israel.

As Christians, whatever we believe about Israel must be grounded in Scripture first, and no other Scripture is more pertinent to the conversation than the next three chapters of Romans.

CONTEXT: Remember, when we began this study, we said that the church in Rome, like most of the churches of the New Testament, was made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

Biblically speaking, you are a part of one of those two groups - you are Jewish, or you are Gentile (meaning everybody else).

The Roman church, in particular, seemed to struggle significantly between the two groups. Paul is constantly going back and forth in the letter to address each one.

In Chapter 8, Paul made some of the strongest statements he ever made about God's ability to finish what He started: that if God saves you - the same God that justified you- He will see to it that you are Sanctified and ultimately glorified. GOD always finishes what He started.

Now, you can almost hear the objection from the Jews. Because something had happened - It seemed that God wasn't finishing what He started with the Jews.

John 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

In **Acts 10** - God made it clear to Peter that the Gentiles, who had previously been considered unclean, would not get to participate in the Gospel promise.

Even in Paul's own history, again and again things had happened like,

Acts 13:44-48 (ESV)

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ***"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."*** ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

We are turning to the Gentiles.

In **Romans 11:13 (ESV)**, Paul describes himself as the ¹³ ...apostle to the Gentiles...

It makes sense why the Jewish brethren in the Roman church would raise the question - "What about all of the promises God made to Israel? Has God abandoned the people and His promise?" So, Paul tackles that issue in the text before us.

NOW - for clarification, there are three ways that the Bible speaks of Israel, and you would do well to understand them. In fact, many misunderstandings about various passages spring from a failure to recognize the sense in which the Bible uses the word "Israel."

Four Understandings of the Word Israel:

1. **Ethnic Israel** - This is speaking of those people who are physically, biologically descended from Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. This is the way John the Baptist was using the concept in **Matthew 3:9 (ESV)** ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.
2. **National Israel** - This is speaking of Israel as a Political Entity, with laws, a government, borders, etc.
 - In Genesis, God promised a land to Abraham and his descendants.
 - In Exodus, God raised up Moses to lead ethnic Israel out of Egypt and to establish the law and political organization.
 - In Joshua, they occupied the land of promise and set up a government - as a Theocracy, then a Monarchy.
 - That continued through the reign of Solomon, after which they were under the Judgment of God: the nation divided, exiled, and occupied.
 - Even during the time of Christ they were under Roman occupation. But the prophets had promised again and again, God wasn't done with Israel - they would be re-established as a Political Entity. That is why the disciples asked in **Acts 1:6 (ESV)** ⁶ ... "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
 - One of the wonderful things about being alive in our Generation is that we are seeing that promise answered before our very eyes! May 14, 1948, Israel was once again declared an independent nation and established as a Parliamentary Republic.
3. **Religious Israel** - This refers to those who faithfully practiced the religion of the Old Testament. I use "practiced" in the past tense because to faithfully practice the religion of the Old Testament would have been to receive the Messiah of the New Testament. Christianity is basically fulfilled Judaism. But there are times when scripture indicates that a person may be ethnically Jewish, politically Jewish, but not within the true faith of Israel.

- **John 1:47** — Jesus calls Nathanael “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.” Nathanael is not merely an Israelite by birth; he embodies what an Israelite ought spiritually to be.
 - Already in Romans, Paul has made statements like **Romans 2:28–29** — “No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly.... But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart.” Paul distinguishes external ethnicity from inward covenant faithfulness.
- 4. Corporate Israel** - There will be times when the text will indicate that Israel has rejected Christ, but that does not mean every single ethnic Israeli has rejected Christ. Paul himself was Jewish. The Church in Rome had many Jewish members. Those are considered the “remnant.” God always has for Himself a remnant of believing Jews in every generation. But often the text will indicate that Israel as an establishment has done this or that. We must separate that from the believing remnant of Israel.

So, to interpret the term correctly, we must understand which of the four senses the Bible uses. At times the three overlap - but we must know when that is happening. It is happening in the passage before us.

CONTEXT: In Romans 9, 10, and 11, Paul is answering the question: do the promises God made to Ethnic Israel, which include that they will be made into Spiritual Israel and established as Political Israel forever and ever, still stand?

If God finishes what He started, is that true for our friends who are Jewish?

1. The Pain of Israel's Rejection-

Paul begins by making it clear that this is not cold theology, but rather a heartbreaking reality.

Romans 9:1–5 (ESV)

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

This was extremely personal for Paul. When he thought of Israel, he didn't think of a foreign people with strange customs - he thought of Aunts, Uncles, Siblings, perhaps even Parents. These are people Paul was willing to receive God's wrath on their behalf. So, whatever he says in the passages ahead, it must be understood through the lens of pain. These are perhaps three of the most difficult chapters Paul would ever pen. Why? **Verse 4** -

⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and

from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Notice there, he uses the phrase, “according to the flesh” to indicate that he is speaking of Ethnic Israel. Jesus was born into a Jewish family. Jesus would have received the sign of the Covenant on the 8th day. Jesus attended synagogue. He kept the Sabbath; he celebrated Passover. At the right hand of God sits a Jewish Man. That’s very important to remember.

The Jews were uniquely God’s own possession.

ILLUSTRATION: I think of it like we as Evangelical Protestants think of Mary, we honor her, but we don’t worship her. Mary herself said in her Magnificat, “I rejoice in God my Savior.” Mary was a sinner in need of a Savior, so we don’t pray to Mary; praying to the dead is called necromancy in Scripture, and it’s forbidden. But we do honor Mary as a person chosen for a very special purpose. **Luke 1:48 (ESV)** ⁴⁸...For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; We do honor and consider her blessed among all women for bearing the Christ. But we don’t worship her.

In the same way - we recognize the unique place that Israel holds in the created order, we honor them, we count them as blessed among the tribes of the Earth - but we don’t worship Israel. That’s a warning much of the church needs to hear.

In fact, you cannot worship a culture and evangelize it simultaneously. Look at ***Romans 10:1*** -

Romans 10:1–4 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Do you know what that means? A Jew can’t go to Heaven by simply being a Jew. Not even by being a good Jew. There is no plan A for Gentiles and plan B for Jews - they need Jesus.

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

So Israel’s rejection of Jesus should be something that grieves us, at it grieved Paul, and grieves God.

Paul’s Spirit-filled passion for souls is simply a reflection of the heart of God.

- **Ezekiel 33** reveals the heart of God in this way: “‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked’”

- **I Timothy 2:3, 4** says, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Do you see that - God, in a sense, desires all people to be saved. Now, some would say, “Pastor Zach, when he says all there He doesn’t mean all, He means some”. Well, I would simply say to that - he had a very peculiar way of saying that.

- **II Peter 3:9**, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

God’s heart is patience, so that everyone has an opportunity, and his heart is that no one would go to hell.

- And then the great end zone verse of **John 3:16, 17**, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,”—that would be Jesus—“that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Whoever believes in Jesus receives the gift of eternal life. There is no one here, if you believe in Jesus, who will be cast away or rejected.

Here is the point. God is good. God desires you to be saved. God desires you to come to Jesus. God invites you to come to Jesus. And some people do not because they refuse Jesus. They reject Jesus. They resist Jesus. They disobey Jesus.

The Pain of Israel’s Rejection -

2. The Purpose of Israel’s God -

Romans 9:6–13 (ESV)

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

Ok, remember when God told Abraham and Sarah they would have a son, they decided to help God out and let Abraham get the servant girl Hagar pregnant. Hagar had a son named Ishmael. But God wouldn’t send the covenant promises through Ismael, but through Isaac, the son born by faith in the promise. So, Abraham had other sons, but not according to the promise.

⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh (Ishmael) who are the children of God, but the children of the promise (Isaac) are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Now in verse 10, he moves to the next generation -

¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or

bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Now, both Esau and Jacob were descended from Abraham - but they were not both children of the Covenant. Jacob would be the son of the Covenant, and Esau rejected. Why? Listen - the text is saying, THERE IS NO WHY. There was a why in the previous generation: one was the child of promise, the other was man’s works. But not so with these two. One was the child of Covenant, the other was NOT - simply because of God’s Free Will to decide.

What is the automatic human response to that? That’s not fair! Paul anticipates that response -

Romans 9:14–29 (ESV)

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

We have to remember that God has the ultimate free will. Our free will cannot usurp the Free Will of God.

¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Paul Illustrates with Pharaoh:

¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Have you read Exodus? Humanly speaking, Pharaoh is a powerful monarch, but over and over, God turns the hand of the King like a channel of water that exists purely for his good pleasure.

ILLUSTRATION: Over the next couple of weeks, billboards will go up around the country to announce the grand opening of our Central Nassau campus. We designed them, we paid for them, we decided the message they will proclaim to the world. In the same way - ***Pharaoh was a billboard to history, saying - God is in control.***

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

Now get that - God can create a man in such a way that DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY is completely determinative without compromising or invalidating HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

A simpler way to say that - *if you go to Hell it's your fault, if you go to Heaven it's God's fault.*

ILLUSTRATION: Someone once asked Spurgeon how he reconciled Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility - he said, dear chap, the two are not at odds, but rather friends; one must not reconcile friends but enemies.

²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory — ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Every single person under the sound of my voice will glorify God forever and ever and ever and ever - either by creation looking at you in your redeemed state and saying, "Isn't God gracious to save such a person?" Or by looking at you in your condemned state and saying, "Isn't God Holy to judge such a person?"

Paul is making clear that in eternity there will be Jews in Hell as well as Heaven, and Gentiles in Hell as well as Heaven.

²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' " ²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.' "

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Now, some of us may be thinking here, what does all of this talk about Israel have to do with a Gentile living on the other side of the planet as I listen to a Baptist Preacher - let me answer that for you. If God would deal severely with His chosen people, and not let them into Heaven because of Abraham's faith, do you think you'll get in because you had a good mom and dad, or your uncle was a Preacher? Or your grandad was a deacon? No, you will come to God by faith in Jesus Christ alone, or you will perish under the wrath of God for all eternity.