

Title: Hardened Against God

Text: Romans 11:7–10

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

By U2 (released in 1987)

I have climbed highest mountains

I have run through the fields

Only to be with you

Only to be with you

I have run

I have crawled

I have scaled these city walls

These city walls

Only to be with you

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

In a 2014 piece called "The Church of U2," Rothman outlined the case for this song as a potent contemporary hymn, partly because of the uncertainty expressed in Bono's lyrics. "It's a song about searching for meaning or transcendence," he says. "And to me, the most interesting thing about it is that you don't find it. It's about the search."

Meanwhile, Jon Pareles, chief pop critic for The New York Times, believes much of the song's power comes from the way Bono lingers on one word: "still."

"The genius of the chorus is in its first two words," Pareles says. "There's the leap from 'I still' and 'haven't found.' That 'still' emphasized in the melody tells you he's been looking for a long time. It's a simple thing. But it's a profound thing."

This sentiment can certainly be attributed to the Nation of Israel. En Masse, they, the Jews that failed to recognize Jesus as their King/Messiah is still looking for the Messiah. But they will not find him until they find their King in Jesus...

Main Idea - They Still Haven't Found What They're Looking For!

There were some Jews that did recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but the vast majority in Jesus' day and after refused God's Messiah and are still looking for another. This is true to this day.

So, is God finished with them? No, not at all.

Romans 11:7 ESV

⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

Do you see what Paul said? *"Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking."*

What were they seeking?

They were seeking righteousness, and they were trying to obtain it through religious zeal. But religious zeal was insufficient to obtain a righteousness that would make them right with God.

Paul has made this point throughout chapters 9-11...

Romans 9:31–32 ESV

³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

Romans 10:2–3 ESV

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.

According to verse 7, who did find it? The elect. The remnant of believing Jews who, like their father Abraham, believed it was an issue of faith in God's promises, not works of righteousness.

Romans Israel's Present Situation: A Summary (11:7–10)

They are the Israel within Israel (9:6), the "remnant chosen by grace" (11:5). These Jews, "the elect" (11:7), have obtained the right standing with God that Israel as a whole was seeking.

Titus 3:5–6 ESV

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

The first church, filled with Jews, understood this well.

They understood that it was Christ, who was the end of the law.

Romans 10:4 ESV

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

In other words, Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly in a way sinful humans, Jew or Gentile could never hope to.

Matthew 5:17 ESV

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

There were those that believed this because of God's gracious electing work.

God graciously drew them to Himself...

John 6:44 ESV

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

God is intimately involved in salvific work.

At the same time, the text tells us that God did something in them that we might find a little unsettling, but true nonetheless.

God has performed a partial judicial hardening on them.

A what?

A Judicial Hardening...

We talked about Judicial hardening when I preached through the Gospel of John. If you remember, God hardened the Jewish leadership in particular so that Jesus would be killed by them. Later in the book of Acts, we see a lifting of this hardening when the church, comprised of Jews, was born.

John 12:40 ESV

⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."

It's the same hardening we see in Exodus with Moses and Pharaoh

Exodus 4:21 ESV

²¹ And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."

Please note regarding Pharaoh, that he hardened his heart before God ever stepped in with the judicial hardening. Humans are always responsible for their hard hearts first and foremost.

Romans Israel's Present Situation: A Summary (11:7–10)

God confirms the spiritual insensitivity that people are locked up under by virtue of their sin in Adam.

We are the rebels and God is under no obligation to save anyone. It is only by His grace and mercy that he saves any!

πωρώ pōrōō - Harden

πωρώ pōrōō; a small piece of stone broken off from a larger one. The verb means to harden, make hard like a stone, or callous and insensible to the touch. In the NT applied only in a spiritual sense to the hearts or minds of men. - The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (4456. πωρώ pōrōō)

2 Corinthians 3:14 ESV

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

"Hardened" (11:7–10). The Gk. porosis is a strong term. God stiffened the already existing attitude and character of His rebellious people and brought about the growth of a calcified layer

of thinking about religion that cemented Israel into a permanent insensibility. Never suppose that rejecting God's grace carries no consequences. It does. This hardening is a divine judgment.
- *The Bible Reader's Companion (Romans 11)*

In Romans 11:7-10, like before, Paul appeals back to the Old Testament to demonstrate from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (the whole of the Jewish scriptures) demonstrating this Judgement was not a new idea from God but something He has planned for a very long time - before the foundations of the earth in fact. And it is fascinating to me that Paul proves from their own scriptures what they should have understood.

"The majority group (11:7-10): Three Old Testament men predicted that God would harden the hearts of unbelieving Israel." The Outline Bible

Okay, let's take a look at the first two witnesses that Paul uses.

1. **The Law and the Prophets Warned the Hardening Would Happen - (vs. 8)**

Romans 11:8 ESV

⁸ as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

What is interesting about verse 8 is that Paul blends two verses from two different genres together.

What does this mean?

It means that Paul uses the genre of Law, written by Moses and the genre of the prophets, written by Isaiah and mashes them together to prove a powerful point.

Romans Israel's Present Situation: A Summary (11:7-10)

The quotation in verse 8 is a composite. Most of it comes from Deuteronomy 29:4, but the phrase "spirit of stupor" is from Isaiah 29:10

The point is God confirmed in his already hardened people, a people who were given every advantage to know better, a judicial hardness that they would not recover from for quite some time.

This may be hard for you to hear, but God can do with His creation whatever he wishes. He is the creator of all that is and the all-powerful sovereign.

Angie and I were just discussing the point of the British Monarchy. It seems, and no disrespect to the King of England, he serves with no real power.

What is the point of the British Monarchy? From their website...

"The Sovereign acts as a focus for national identity, unity and pride; gives a sense of stability and continuity; officially recognises success and excellence; and supports the ideal of voluntary service. In all these roles The Sovereign is supported by members of their immediate family." - <https://www.royal.uk/role-monarchy>

The King of England can influence, but holds no significant power as one would think a king should wield. It is the Prime Minister and Parliament that hold the real power.

How about King Jesus?

Revelation 19:15–16 ESV

¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Jews hardened themselves against the idea that Jesus was their King, and now they are confirmed by God in that hardness.

In fact, what does Paul emphasize from Moses and Isaiah?

God gave them three things....

- **“a spirit of stupor”** – *“an attitude of deadness towards spiritual things. They make no response to the things of God (any more than a stupefied body does to physical stimuli). This is not seen as an excuse; as Earle points out, “A drunkard may claim that he is not responsible for what he does. But he is accountable for getting into that state. So with those whose hearts are dulled by disobedience.”* - Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 403.
- **“eyes that would not see”** - Blind to the movements of God
- **“ears that would not hear”** - Deaf to the voice of God

The Epistle to the Romans 1. The Remnant of Israel, 11:1–10

“He spells this out with references to eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. That part of them that ought to be most sensitive to the divine leading is not operative, not functioning as it was intended to function.”

For how long?

- down to this very day! Paul isn’t just talking about ancient biblical history. He is speaking to the reality that the Jews are still in this condition as he writes this passage.

Don’t forget that although Paul was called by God to be the Apostle to the gentiles ([Galatians 1:15-16](#)), he would always go to the Jews first in whatever town he found himself in.

Acts 17:2 ESV

² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Paul loved the Jews because God loved the Jews. But for this season, the Jewish people are blind, deaf, and in a stupor regarding Jesus as their King.

Review - They (the Jews) still haven’t found what they’re looking for.

The Law and the Prophets warned the hardening would happen

2. The Writings Promised the Hardening Would Take Place (vs. 9-10)

Romans 11:9–10 ESV

⁹ And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”

The next witness for the hardening of Israel against Jesus as Messiah is none other than King David. This quote comes from...

Psalm 69:22–23 ESV

²² Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. ²³ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually.

But there are also additional words from...

Psalm 35:8 ESV

⁸ Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it! And let the net that he hid ensnare him; let him fall into it—to his destruction!

and

Psalm 38:4 ESV

⁴ For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

So, much like Paul’s previous quote, this too is a mash-up of verses to make his point.

Interestingly, [Psalm 69](#) is quoted many times in the New Testament regarding the prophecies of Christ. Yes, the Old Testament often talks about the NT.

In verse 9, Paul quotes, *“Let their table...”*

Usually, a table is a place where food and sustenance are appreciated and enjoyed.

Trouble is not expected - ***Unless you are at Thanksgiving dinner and bring up religion or politics.***

But Paul is using this passage to show *the source of nourishment* (God himself) becomes *the source of trouble*” (PNTC).

The Epistle to the Romans 1. The Remnant of Israel, 11:1–10

“Perhaps Paul is thinking that the Scriptures, which should have been a source of spiritual nourishment to the Jews, are in fact the very thing that brings about their downfall, for they use them wrongly.”

So, the table becomes a snare or a trap.

MacArthur says, *“Many people trust in the very things that damn them.”* MSB

Leon Morris says, *“but it properly means the bait stick of a trap, the stick which triggers off the trapping mechanism when a bird or animal makes contact”* (PNTC).

Of course, the trap, when tripped, leads to stumbling.

What is interesting is the phrase David adds and Paul quotes.

“and a retribution for them...”

David uses this phrase against his enemies. Paul uses it against the Jews that are hardened against God himself.

The irony here is breathtaking.

God’s own people are declared by God’s own word to be enemies of God Himself!

This had to rock their world.

There is no question that Paul believed deeply that the unbelieving Jew will not escape God’s retribution against them.

Romans 11:10 ESV

¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”

Their hardness led to God hardening them.

Isaiah 6:9–10 ESV

⁹ And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

This is their judgment.

Their backs will be bent under the oppressive weight of their sin, shame, and guilt. They will be punished forever.

Wow! This is a major downer! Is there any hope for the Jewish people?

Yes! There is hope!

Romans 11:1 (ESV)

¹ I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:25 ESV

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

God will once again turn His attention to the nation of Israel. He will fulfill all the promises that He made to them throughout the Old Testament.

God is not done with His people. Otherwise, God is a liar.

What do I mean?

Take a look at a promise made to the Israelites from the Prophet Hosea.

Hosea 3:4 ESV

⁴ For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

This promise has already been fulfilled literally throughout the last 2000+ years, since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.

But take a look at the next verse...

Hosea 3:5 ESV

⁵ Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

This has not taken place yet.

So, here is the million-dollar question.

Can we see a literal fulfillment of verse 4 and not a literal fulfillment of verse 5?

Should we have a literal physical fulfillment of God's promise and then a spiritualized fulfillment of what appears to be a future fulfillment?

I would argue that if the first fulfillment is physical, so the second shall be.

Isn't this the case in [Luke 1:31-33](#)?

Listen for the promises to Mary...

Luke 1:31-33 ESV

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Did you notice the seven promises to Mary in these verses? Five of these promises have been literally fulfilled.

1. She conceived

2. Bore a son

3. Called Him Jesus

4. He is great

5. Called Son of the Most High

Is it unreasonable to think that...

1. He will be given the throne of his father David

2. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever without end.

Listen, God's unfulfilled promises to Israel WILL BE FULFILLED TO ISRAEL, not the church! This is Paul's point in [Romans 11](#). While it is true during this season, when a Jew becomes saved, he becomes part of the church. And there is certainly overlap between the church and Israel; they are and always will be a distinction between these people groups.

Listen to Dr. John MacArthur on this subject in his sermon entitled...

Why Every Calvinist Should Be a Premillennialist, Part 6

"Back in March, when we had the Shepherd's conference here at our church, I decided to give a message on the future of Israel and the issue of eschatology, and the doctrine of election, pointing to the fact that if you believed in the doctrine of election, the Old Testament was very clear that God had elected Israel for a future glorious Kingdom and salvation. I gave that in one message, one, very important message that was very well received and stirred up no small amount of conversation..."

"I originally entitled it Sovereign Election, Israel, and Eschatology. It really was a presentation of biblical premillennialism or, if you will, biblical millennialism. That is the confidence that the scripture indeed does teach a future 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth explicitly and exactly as [Revelation 20](#) describes it. And that in that 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth, there will be the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel in the past given through the Abrahamic covenant, Davidic covenant, and New covenant. And all of God's people, not just Israel but all of God's people through history, including the redeemed church and the redeemed in the time of the tribulation to come, will all enjoy the blessings of that glorious reign."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1oEmg6iqow&list=RDLVy5kAzqw9j54&start_radio=1&rv=y5kAzqw9j54

God has hardened the nation of Israel, but He is not finished with them. They, as a Nation have a very special place in His future Kingdom.

Review - They (the Jews) still haven't found what they're looking for.

The Law and the Prophets warned the hardening would happen

The Writings Promised the Hardening Would Take Place

Conclusion

So what?

First, we must be careful to interpret Scripture carefully and consistently. This science is called hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation.

"If the plain sense makes sense, go with no other sense otherwise you will end up with nonsense."

Secondly, There is a implied warning for you today -

The Jews, who were given the very oracles of God, grew hard to the truths of the Word of God.

Christian, you have a responsibility to the Holy Scriptures. You have the glorious privilege to know and do what the Word of God says. You do have to study, learn, understand, and apply what God has said.

Be careful. Apathy, for the things of God, can slowly and relentlessly creep in. You can become hardened to God and His truth. Don't Allow Your Hardness Against God to Become a Judicial Hardening from God.

"Whenever the conviction of God's Spirit comes there is the softening of the whole nature to obey; but if the obedience is not instant there will come a metallic hardening and a corrupting of the guidance of God." — Oswald Chambers

"All that God had to do to harden Pharaoh's heart, or to harden your heart, is to withhold His own grace."— R.C. Sproul

"Hardened" (11:7–10). The Gk. *porosis* is a strong term. God stiffened the already existing attitude and character of His rebellious people and brought about the growth of a calcified layer of thinking about religion that cemented Israel into a permanent insensibility. **Never suppose that rejecting God's grace carries no consequences. It does. This hardening is a divine judgment.** - *The Bible Reader's Companion (Romans 11)*

Thirdly, I started this sermon off with the U2 song, "I Still Haven't Found What I've Been Looking For."

The Jews are still looking for the Messiah. Are you? Gospel...

Connection Group Questions

1. Why do you think Paul wrote chapter 11 of Romans? What purpose does it serve?
2. Why do you think the Jews still don't accept Christ? Why haven't they found what they are looking for?
3. What is the significance of the witness of Moses, Isaiah, and David in these verses? Why does Paul employ their words?
4. Why is the literal fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews important to understand and believe?
5. What should believers learn from verses 7-10?