Sermon Highlights

God Has Not Cast Away His People: Israel, the Gentiles, and the Purpose of God in Romans 11

Summary:

Drawing from Romans 11, this sermon examines the third and final section of the apostle Paul's extended treatment of Israel's place in God's redemptive plan, following his discussions of Israel's past in chapter 9 and Israel's present condition in chapter 10. Pastor Bruce Gordon emphasizes that God has not permanently rejected the Jewish people, presenting three proofs from the text: Paul's own Jewish identity, the example of Elijah and the 7,000 faithful remnant, and the ongoing work of God's grace. The sermon explains the distinction between three groups addressed in Scripture -- Jews, Gentiles, and the church -- and stresses that proper hermeneutics is essential to rightly dividing the Word of God. The blindness that has come upon Israel is partial and temporary, lasting until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. At that point, God will restore the nation of Israel, and all Israel -- meaning the nation as a whole -- will turn to Christ in faith during the tribulation period, fulfilling the irrevocable promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs. The sermon closes with Paul's doxology in Romans 11:33-36, celebrating the unsearchable wisdom and knowledge of God who sovereignly works all things according to his purpose.

Key Points:

- God has not permanently cast away the Jewish people; they remain his chosen nation with unfulfilled promises yet to be realized

- Proper Bible interpretation requires identifying which of the three groups -- Jews, Gentiles, or the church -- a passage is addressing, as applying a passage to the wrong group leads to theological confusion

- Paul offers three proofs that God has not abandoned Israel: his own Jewish identity and lineage, the story of Elijah and the 7,000 reserved remnant, and the ongoing operation of God's grace

- Israel's national blindness is a judicial act of God, partial in scope and temporary in duration, lasting only until the times of the Gentiles are complete

- The phrase "all Israel will be saved" refers not to every individual Jew throughout history, but to the nation of Israel as a whole turning to Christ during the tribulation period, when the greatest revival among the Jewish people will take place

- The church will not be present during the tribulation period; God does not deal with the church and Israel simultaneously, and the rapture precedes the restoration of Israel

- The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable; God's promises to Abraham and his descendants will be fulfilled without exception, because God is always true to his word

- The olive tree illustration warns Gentiles against arrogance, reminding them that the blessings they enjoy flow from the root of Israel, and that God's severity and goodness are both real

- Paul's closing doxology in Romans 11:33-36 acknowledges that even the apostle himself does not fully comprehend the depths of God's sovereign plan, and that God requires no counsel and owes no debt to any creature

Scripture Reference:

- Romans 11:23-36, the primary passage covering the future restoration of Israel, the mystery of Israel's partial blindness, the fullness of the Gentiles, the irrevocable gifts and calling of God, and Paul's doxology

- Romans 8, referenced regarding the security of the believer and what cannot separate the church from the love of God

- Isaiah 53, Isaiah 7, and Isaiah 9, referenced as messianic passages the Jewish people have been blinded to

- Daniel 2, referenced as the beginning of the times of the Gentiles following Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple

- Romans 10, referenced regarding the confession and belief required for salvation

Stories:

- The story of Elijah in the wilderness: after his confrontation with Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah despaired and declared himself the only faithful Israelite remaining; God corrected him by revealing that 7,000 had been reserved who had not bowed to Baal, illustrating that God always preserves a faithful remnant even when it is invisible to human eyes

- The olive tree illustration from Romans 11: Paul describes Israel as a cultivated olive tree from which natural branches were broken off due to unbelief, while wild olive branches representing the Gentiles were grafted in; he uses this to warn Gentiles against pride and to affirm that God is able to graft the natural branches back in, which he will do at the appointed time

- The historical division of the ten northern tribes from Judah and Benjamin: referenced to highlight Paul's pride in being from the tribe of Benjamin, which remained faithful alongside Judah when the northern kingdom rebelled, connecting his lineage to a heritage of covenant faithfulness