

Romans 11: Root, Remnant and Whole 06-11-17 PM

For three chapters (9-11) Paul is explaining the place of Israel in the covenant of Christ. First, he makes it clear that Israel's covenant (through Moses) was designed with faults (Heb. 8:7). Second, in chapter 10 he describes justification by faith, a spiritual pursuit that Israel failed to understand. Now he returns to the point of Israel's failure, but makes it clear that not all are lost.

Paul said that Israel failed to find Christ in the Law. However, he meant this generally, not specific to every person in Israel. To describe this idea that there are a few who are saved in Israel he uses the term "remnant". Indeed, Paul is a member of this remnant.

Remnant is an important term in the Bible. It is used to describe a small group of people who are saved or preserved from a larger group. There was a remnant in the ark in the flood (1 Pet. 3:20). There was a remnant (Joshua and Caleb) to survive the wilderness as adults (Num. 14:30). There was a remnant of Judah (1 Kings 11:13) and a remnant of Israel (1 Kings 19:10). Finally, only a remnant returned from captivity (Ez.2:64). All of this reinforces an important idea that Jesus states in Luke 13:23 – that only a few will be saved. This is the language of "remnant".

One of the more difficult parts of Romans 11 is the language used by Paul to describe Israel's fall. He tells us that Israel was hardened, to be broken off of the promise. Specifically, God did not give Israel all knowledge to understand. More clearly though, Israel chose not to understand (Isaiah 6:9-10), a point Jesus made in Matthew 13. God did not desire Israel's failure, but the new covenant needed their failure in order to be established.

Then Paul speaks to an idea of our election by Grace. Some confuse this idea so as to think it means that God selected only a few people for the plan of salvation. A simple study of Scripture reveals this cannot be the case. Peter tells us that God shows no favoritism (Acts 10:34-35). Too, we are told that God does want all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Finally, we are told that the plan of salvation is open to all men (Tit. 2:11). Therefore, the election of Grace pertains to the obedience of the Gospel. Indeed, Paul is constantly reminding his readers that Israel's failure was disobedience. As Peter said (Acts 10:35) "*in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*".

Israel's fall was necessary. It was designed to reveal the need for a perfect High Priest and a perfect Sacrifice. Israel's fall is a testimony of God (his severity and mercy). It tells us that disobedience results in separation (1 Corinthians 10:11-12). Paul says that the broken branches testify to the Vinedresser, and as a warning to the grafted.

Finally, Paul sums up with God's message: all Israel will be saved. We must see this in context with the preceding verse; all Israel refers to the fullness of the church with both the Jew and the Gentile, the theme of Romans. Paul told us in chapter 9: 7 that "*they are not all Israel who are of Israel*". Here Israel is revealed to be the church. The church did not replace Israel, but Israel was a foreshadow of the church.