

Why Did Israel Not Believe?

📖 Romans 10:18-21

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Last time we looked at Romans 10:14-17. The important thing to keep in mind is that the nation Israel is primarily in view and that “salvation” in the context refers to the nation Israel being rescued from their enemies in the end times. Paul uses five deliberative subjunctives in order to get us to reason with him through the necessary preconditions for the nation Israel coming to be rescued from their enemies in end times. He orders them in reverse so that we use back planning to see the necessary steps involved. First, in 10:14, “How will the nation Israel call on Jesus as Lord in order to be delivered from their enemies if they have not believed in Him?” In order to call on Him they must have already believed in Him. Second, “How will they believe in Jesus as Lord if they have not heard about Him?” In order to believe in Him they must have heard about Him. Third, “How will they hear about Him without a proclaimer?” In order to hear about Him a proclaimer must proclaim the gospel of the Christ to them. Fourth, in 10:15, “And how will they proclaim the message unless they are sent out for that purpose?” In order to proclaim the gospel of the Christ a proclaimer must be sent out. The sequence then in proper order is first sending, then proclaiming, then hearing, then believing and finally calling. The Book of Revelation, written later, reveals that the main people involved in this will be the two witnesses in the land of Israel and the 144,000 witnesses outside the land of Israel. The steps are what is known as an *ordo salutis* or order of salvation. These witnesses have to be sent, they have to preach, the nation has to hear, the nation has to believe and then they have to call on Jesus as Lord to be saved from their enemies. Of course, the list is not exhaustive since other things can be included from other passages, such as prayer, that the Lord would send out workers into His harvest, but it is a logical list and Paul wants us to think through the logical necessity of what must happen to bring Israel from being lost to being saved, the details of which are filled out in the Book of Revelation. In 10:15 he elaborates from Isaiah on the necessity of one being sent to proclaim. For Isaiah wrote, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” By “good news” Isaiah is referring to the good things of Israel’s kingdom being restored or what is known in the Gospels and Revelation as the gospel of the kingdom. “However,” in 10:16, at the first advent of the Messiah Israel did not receive the good news about Him and His kingdom and Isaiah spoke about this too when he said, “Lord, who has believed our report?” The response of the nation Israel to their Messiah and the kingdom was disappointing; not many believed but this was predicted in Isa 53.

I want to turn briefly to John 12:37 because here we see the fact that they did not believe. John quotes the same verse from Isaiah 53:1. In the context Jesus is imploring the Jewish crowds to believe on Him while He is still with them. In verse 37 we get the report; "But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. ³⁸*This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?"* ³⁹For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ⁴⁰"HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." ⁴¹These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him." That's the report about the nation Israel. As a nation they saw His messianic miracles and yet did not believe Him to be the Messiah. Isaiah is said to have predicted it. However, just because the nation Israel as a whole did not believe, that did not mean that there were not individual Jews who did believe. We get that report in verse 42; "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but" note the distinction made between believing in Him and confessing Him that is pointed out next, "but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." So you see a clear distinction between believing in Him and confessing Him. Yet people like John MacArthur come to a text like this and say, obviously they didn't truly believe in Him because if they had they would as a necessary characteristic of true belief confessed Him. But that's not what it says. Or Ryrie says confessing Him is a synonym for believing in Him but that clearly is not the case. The text says many even of the rulers believed in Him but for fear of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him. Can a person really believe in Him and then not confess Him for fear of others? I'd imagine you have done it yourself! And frankly I think it is silly to try and get around such clear statements of the text. Of course a person can believe in Him and be justified freely and then in a tight situation not confess Him for fear of others. It doesn't make it right but it can and does happen. My point taking us to John 12:37ff is to show that Isaiah predicted that the nation as a whole would not believe the gospel but that individuals within the nation did believe the gospel and yet because of fear of the Pharisees they did not confess Him before men.

Now as we go back to Romans 10 you think of the Gospels and the big picture there is that the nation Israel did not believe, only a remnant of Israel did believe. And so you go into the Book of Acts and the Church begins in Acts 2 and it's all Jewish and then in Acts 8 it brings in Samaritans and then in Acts 10 it absorbs Gentiles. In Acts 13 Paul goes out on his first missionary expedition and the number of believing Gentiles begins to grow and by Acts 15 they have to have the first church council to deal with all the Gentiles coming into the Church and pretty soon the number of believing Gentiles is far outnumbering the number of believing Jews. The big question that the Jewish believers are having by the time Romans is written in AD57 is "Is God through with our nation? Mostly it's just Gentiles getting saved now. Are the covenants that God made with us to establish us in a kingdom forever off the table? What is happening?" Paul's big answer is no, God made unconditional, unilateral, eternal covenants with Israel and He's not going to go back on His covenants. What has happened is the nation Israel has been partially blinded as divine discipline for rejecting their Messiah. And so generation after generation

down to our own day the nation as a whole will not believe that Jesus is the Messiah but there are always individual Jews who do believe that Jesus is the Messiah even though there a small proportion of the number of Gentile believers. This is mainly an epoch of Gentile salvation and that's why Paul says later, when the fullness of the Gentiles, which is a reference to the rapture, then Israel's partial blindness will be removed, the two witnesses and the 144,000 will be sent to the nation to proclaim the gospel, they will proclaim it, the nation will hear it, the nation will believe it and when the nations have them in a corner they'll call on Him to be saved. Then, at last, God will fulfill His covenants with them in the kingdom and Israel will finally have rest.

Back in 10:17, finishing up our review, 10:17 is an abridged *ordo salutis*. And it's a principle. It's always true that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the proclaimed word of Christ." Now if this is true an interesting line of questioning arises. If faith comes from hearing and hearing by the proclaimed word of Christ then why didn't Israel have faith? Did they not hear? Did they not understand? Was the word of Christ not proclaimed to them? Why for heaven's sake didn't they believe? Now what we're reading here is something common in Paul. Paul was always introducing hypothetical opponents or objections to his arguments. Some people think I argue a lot, that I want to argue everything down the nth detail and close off every loophole and by argue I mean make a case. Well, I'm nothing compared to the apostle Paul so if you don't like it that I argue every point then you're not going to like the apostle Paul in heaven because this man was extremely argumentative and I suggest there's already a lot of people who don't like him and that's why they don't read him. The guy simply won't stop. He was so detailed that King Agrippa said to him in Acts 26, Paul, you're going to go out of your mind! So you have to deal with someone who is what many consider borderline insanity. And what Paul is doing here is introducing some objections to the principle in 10:17 that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

Why then didn't Israel come to faith? Did Israel not hear? That's what verse 18 is asking. Is the reason Israel did not come to faith because they didn't have the opportunity to come to faith? They didn't get to hear the gospel? So someone might argue "**But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?**" Because if they've heard then on your principle Paul that faith comes by hearing they would have believed. But Paul says, **On the contrary**. The word translated **on the contrary** is a triple particle crasis *μενουνυγε*. That's three particles blended into one word and it's first in the sentence, meaning this is the emphasis. Paul's answer is NO WAY! It would be entirely wrong to conclude that the reason Israel didn't have faith was because they didn't hear the gospel. They heard it all right. As evidence Paul quotes an OT passage. What OT passage? A famous OT passage. Ps 19:4. "**THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.**" You've probably heard Psalm 19 a hundred times! What's Ps 19 about? General revelation. The general revelation of God made available to all men in all creation. We quote it. David says in the Psalm, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. ²Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. ³There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. ⁴Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world." The trouble with Ps 19 is these strange expressions that seem to contradict. On one hand nature is speaking, on the other hand nature doesn't speak. On one hand

nature is making utterances but on the other hand nature doesn't use words. It's a strange passage that people have wrestled with. The basic idea is that just as language is a pattern and by sharing the patterns we can communicate so nature manifests patterns and we share the patterns so that when we look at creation design, creation complexity we see that it is communicating to us about the Creator. So even though nature doesn't have lips it still speaks and it speaks inevitably of the glory of God and because everybody has contact with creation everybody knows the one true God through creation. And that's Romans 1. They all know Him and so they are all without excuse. No one can argue that God's existence wasn't clear. That argument is not going to work when men stand before Him because they all had creation and God made Himself known to them through creation. Universal knowledge! And they suppress this knowledge. So, uh, oh, they miscalculated that they are going to get away from being found guilty.

What's strange is why Paul would quote this passage to prove that Israel heard the gospel message and they were guilty. Nature doesn't spell out the gospel message. Nature doesn't tell us about Jesus Christ and His death on the cross and His resurrection. So why does Paul quote Ps 19 as evidence that Israel heard the gospel message? It's very simple actually. The NT authors quote the OT in four different ways and we won't go through all of that today, other lessons have done that in detail. But one way, the way here, is called Literal + Application. What this means is that the OT passage is a literal passage and that the NT author picked up that passage and applied one aspect of that passage to a new situation. So by literal we mean that the OT text still maintains its literal meaning. In other words, Ps 19 literally means that general revelation of God through creation is universally available to men. By application, what a NT author like Paul is doing is taking one aspect of that passage and applying it to a different situation. What's the one point of similarity that Paul is picking up? A message communicated over an extended domain. A message communicated over an extended domain. So just as nature communicated a message over the entire extent of creation so the gospel communicated the message over the entire extent of the land of Israel. The gospel had been preached through all Israel and so there was no way someone could argue that the reason Israel did not have faith is because they didn't hear the gospel. If they hadn't heard it they could claim ignorance but as Constable says, "They could not plead ignorance as a nation." Moo suggests that perhaps the quote is hyperbole, maybe not every single Jew heard the gospel, but the point is the same, so prevalent was the gospel message in the nation Israel that it could not be argued that they lacked sufficient opportunity to hear it.

Think of the evidence from the Gospels. We remember that John the Baptist came as the forerunner of the king. He was out baptizing by the Jordan and it says Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan and many were being baptized by him. The baptism by John separated them from the Pharisees and Sadducees and identified them with John and his messianic movement. Those who were baptized by John were promising to look to the one John pointed out as the Messiah and believe in Him. Of course, so many people were identifying with this messianic movement that the Pharisees and Sadducees went out to investigate John. When they went out they wanted to know who John was. They wanted to know if he was Elijah

because he dressed like Elijah, he spoke like Elijah, he had a similar message to Elijah, he ministered in the same area as Elijah and the OT predicted that Elijah would come before the Messiah. But John said, "I am not." I am a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord. John was the Messianic forerunner. So the fact of the Messiah's presence and soon presentation before the nation was well-known in Israel. When Jesus came to John to be baptized John pointed to Him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" His identity was well-known to all in Jerusalem and in Judea and the district around Jordan, a pretty large area. When John was arrested and imprisoned Jesus departed into the Galilee and He began going through all the Galilee teaching Jews in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and sickness. Matthew reports that "the news spread about Him throughout all Syria," to the north, "and the Decapolis," to the east, "and Jerusalem and Judea," to the south, and "beyond the Jordan" to the west. In all four points of the compass the news about Jesus spread. These were well-known facts in Israel and even beyond Israel. Later after Jesus trained His disciples He chose twelve of His disciples to be apostles and sent them out two by two to the house of Israel with the same message, the gospel of the kingdom and the same miracles to authenticate the kingdom message. They went through city after city after city of Israel giving gospel hearing to more and more Jews. At the feasts Jesus would go up to Jerusalem and teach. In the final week of Jesus He taught daily in the Temple which was the mecca for Jews. Everyone in Israel knew. These things did not happen in a corner. So there is no way in hell you could argue that the reason all Israel did not have faith is because they didn't have a good enough opportunity to hear the gospel message. They had ample opportunity to hear the gospel but they did not believe the gospel. So argument one, that Paul shoots down in 10:18, is the argument that if faith comes by hearing and hearing by the preaching of the gospel then the reason Israel did not come to faith is because they didn't hear the gospel, baloney.

In 10:19 we have another argument someone might make against Paul. The argument here is Israel didn't know the gospel in the sense of understanding. They didn't have enough background information to understand the gospel and that's why they didn't believe the gospel. If they'd just been given more background information then they could be held accountable. You'll note, by the way, that all of these arguments are attempts to clear Israel of being responsible for not believing. They're blame-shifting. It's not Israel's fault, it's someone else's fault. This is always the game. It started with Adam and Eve. God came to Adam, "What's going on here? Why did you eat of the tree I told you not to?" "It was the woman you gave me?" "Oh yeah, well woman, what do you have to say for yourself?" "It was the serpent, he tricked me and I ate." It was all just blameshifting and ultimately who were they trying to shift the blame to? Whose fault is it ultimately in Gen 3? God. Adam said it's this woman you gave Me. If you hadn't given me this woman we wouldn't be having a problem. Eve said it's this serpent and if you hadn't let this serpent in the garden we wouldn't be having a problem. So God it's your fault. It's not our fault. This is always the game. If God had set things up differently man wouldn't be in the predicament he's in and so it's God's fault. It's the same thing going on here. Israel's not responsible for not believing the gospel. It's

God's fault. He didn't give enough background information so the gospel could be understood. Let's see how that works out.

The way Paul puts it here is, **But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?** Of course, if you don't know you can't be held responsible. So Israel didn't know, surely they didn't know, right? Paul's answer is to say, "Alright, let's start with Moses first." Moses is the first and greatest prophet of the OT. That's what this means, "First, Moses." It's not a list, it means Moses first of all the OT prophets, the implication being that there were many other prophets who followed Moses that came along and said Israel had so much information, they knew and so that's a sorry excuse! **Moses first** said this, **"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."** Now this is a quote from the OT? Where does it come from? Deut 32:21. So this one comes from the Law. The first five books of the OT are known as the Law and it was the first division of the OT. It's primary for all Jews! The other quote in the next verse comes from whom? Isaiah and Isaiah is one of the Prophets. So we have Moses from the Law and Isaiah from the prophets. Sometimes the expression "Law and the Prophets" is used to refer to the entire OT and so Paul may be saying the whole OT reveals that "Israel knew" and so they have no excuse not to believe.

Now the quote from **Moses first**, **"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."** Deut 32:21. What's Deut 32:21? It's known as the song of Moses. I don't know if Moses sang it but it is the national anthem of Israel, at least the ancient one, the modern one is Hatikvah, but this is the ancient one. Who wrote it? God wrote it. Of all the nations on earth only one nation had their national anthem written by God; the nation Israel. Now with all due respect, Francis Scott Key writes a good anthem but Francis Scott Key couldn't write an anthem that foretold the future of America. When God wrote the national anthem of Israel He wrote it not only about Israel's past but about Israel's future. So it's an anthem that is prophetic, it foretells the future of Israel. In that anthem is where this prediction is found **"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."** Now that is describing God raising up Gentile nations, those that did not have a covenant with God because there is only one nation that has a covenant with God, Israel. So a "no-nation" here is a Gentile nation. And God is predicting that He is going to raise them up to discipline Israel. Gentile nations were the rod in God's hand to whip His Son Israel. And the anthem predicts that they would rebel against Him and God would discipline them with Gentile nations. They knew this. It was written. They should know in the NT period when they are under Roman authority and they see hundreds of thousands of Gentiles coming to faith in the Jewish Messiah that they blew it. They knew. They were living it. It was right in front of their eyeballs. Their national anthem predicted it. So don't give me this line they didn't know. They knew alright. They had all kinds of background information that provided context for the gospel. They just didn't want to have anything to do with it.

For the sake of time, Isaiah in Romans 10:20 is quoted to the same effect. Same type of context, comes out of Isa 65. **Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID**

NOT ASK FOR ME.” Gentiles weren’t interested in the things of God during the OT but they sure found Him in the NT and beyond. Here we are! I don’t think I have to say this room is full Gentile believers and there is not one Jewish believer here. And this is to punish Israel. It’s a sign to them. We have their Messiah and they are supposed to see this and realize, we blew it.

So verse 18, the argument is they didn’t hear the gospel, you know God, you should have made them hear, but you didn’t and that’s why they didn’t believe, but Paul defeated that argument. And verse 19, the argument is they didn’t really understand the gospel, you know God, you should have made it clearer by giving more background information, but you didn’t and that’s why they didn’t believe; Paul destroys that argument. So why didn’t Israel believe? 10:21 answers, the fault does not lie with God, the fault lies with Israel. Isaiah again, 65:2, **But as for Israel He says, “ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”** Now who does the fault lie with? Israel. Entirely it rests upon Israel. God was reaching out, stretching out to them all day long, continually, ongoing. He gave them the adoption as sons, the covenants, the promises, the Temple services, the priesthood, the Law, the prophets, the Shechinah Glory and the Messiah according to the flesh. All of this was God stretching out His hands to them. And they’re going to blame God. I don’t think so. The blame rests entirely on Israel. What did Jesus say in Matt 23:37? “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” Whose fault? Their fault. As Isaiah says, they were **A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.** **DISOBEDIENT** means just what it sounds like it means, rebellious, and **OBSTINATE** means “back talkers.” They rebelled against God and they back talked God. It was not easy for God to parent Israel. God did everything for Israel and yet they still rebelled against Him and talked back to Him. That generation had no excuses. They can’t blame God for not giving them sufficient gospel hearing or sufficient background for gospel understanding. They can’t even argue that God didn’t elect them and that’s why they didn’t believe. That was not the problem. The problem was they were a disobedient and obstinate people.

Now what can we learn by way of application? First, it’s true that a person has to hear the gospel in order to believe. No one can believe if they don’t hear the gospel. You have to have content to believe and you have to be convinced of the truth value of that content in order to believe it. But second, just because someone hears the gospel does not mean they are going to believe it. That’s the whole point with Israel. They heard the gospel but did not believe it. Third, it’s also true that a person has to understand the gospel in order to believe. No one can understand it without proper background. You have to have that background to give context of the gospel so that it is properly understood. But fourth, just because someone understands it with the proper background still does not mean they are going to believe. That’s another point made with Israel. They understood the gospel with proper background but still did not believe it. So fifth, what prohibits someone from believing the gospel? Disobedience and obstinacy toward God. In John 3 Jesus agrees. He says that the Light came into the world but men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds might be exposed.