

The Remnant, Elect by Grace

📖 Romans 11:1-7

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Last time we worked with Romans 10:18-21 which is a series of arguments that are leveled against Paul's principle in 10:17 that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the proclaimed word of Christ. If that statement is true then an objector might say in 10:18, "Why is it that Israel did not have faith? "Surely they" did not hear, did they? "Indeed they" heard, says Paul. He quotes Ps 19:4 to show that just as the voice of creation has gone to all men so the voice of the gospel has gone to all Israel. They are without excuse. The objector in 10:19 turns to another argument "But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?" They did not know in the sense of having enough background information to understand the gospel, did they? Paul quotes "Moses first" who recorded Israel's national anthem in Deut 32:21, a prophetic portion which predicted that Israel would eventually rebel against God and so God would make them frustrated by a non-covenant nation. And in 10:20 he quotes Isaiah who in Isa 65:1 predicts that in the wake of Israel's rejection God would be found by Gentiles who were not seeking Him. So the first objection, that Israel did not hear the gospel is answered by Paul, and the second objection, that they did not know with understanding the gospel is also answered. The nation Israel had ample opportunity to hear the gospel and plenty of background information to understand. Why then, if faith comes by hearing, did Israel not have faith? In 10:21 Paul answers by quoting Isaiah, 65:2, "But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE." Israel simply was a disobedient and obstinate people God had stretched out His hands to Israel all the day long, continually, persistently, and yet they would not come to Him. Who then is to blame for Israel not believing? Israel is to blame. The entirety of the blame rests with Israel. God had reached out to them in fantastic ways. Israel should have believed the good news. Yet they were unwilling. Jesus said 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." So the reason they did not believe is simply because they were an unwilling, disobedient, obstinate people.

In Rom 11 the question is, in light of their rejection of Him, is God going to reject them? In other words, is Israel's disobedience of rejecting God's Messiah going to result in God casting them off forever? That's the question that Paul opens with in Romans 11. **I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? By His people** Paul is

referring to the nation Israel as the covenant people of God. He is not referring to believers in general or believers within the nation Israel. He is speaking of the nation Israel as a whole both believers and unbelievers because God made a covenant with the nation corporately. Therefore, anyone who is a racial descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through the male line is a part of His people because God made a covenant with them. So the question is **God has not rejected His nation Israel, has He?** Paul's answer is with the strongest Greek negative, *μη γενοιτο*, **may it never be!** It is a fifth class optative subjunctive which means it is unthinkable that God is done with the nation Israel.

It is interesting that even though Israel was disobedient and obstinate that God would not reject Israel. Why not? Because, as Paul says in Galatians, the Mosaic covenant that God made with Israel could not invalidate the prior Abrahamic covenant that God made with Israel. The Mosaic covenant was bilateral, conditional and temporary promising blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. But the Abrahamic covenant came 430 years before the Mosaic and it was unilateral, unconditional and eternal promising ultimate blessing in the land. Therefore their disobedience under the Mosaic covenant could not invalidate the prior Abrahamic covenant.

The interrelationship spoken of here between their disobedience to the Mosaic and God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic despite their disobedience is noted here as well as several OT passages. First, 1 Sam 12:22 shows that God will never reject them because of His character. "For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself." God's "great name" refers to His character. Since He unilaterally covenanted with Israel to give them the land, the seed and global blessing then the fulfillment rests entirely upon Him. His character is on the line and therefore He will never abandon them. Second, Jer 31:37 shows that God will never reject them unless the universe could be exhaustively understood by man. He says, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done." Since this is impossible God's casting off Israel is also impossible. The statement is designed to show that God will never reject Israel for any disobedience they have done, even rejecting their own Messiah. Third, Jer 33:24-26 shows that God will never reject them unless the fixed order of the universe is disrupted. He says, "Have you not observed what this people [a foreign nation] have spoken, saying, 'The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them'? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. ²⁵"Thus says the LORD, 'If My covenant for day and night *stand* not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, ²⁶then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.'" Since the fixed order of the universe cannot be disrupted then God's unilateral, unconditional, eternal covenant with Israel cannot be disrupted. His character and the fixed order of the universe dictate that God will never reject the nation Israel for their disobedience. Jeremiah states explicitly that God will restore the fortunes to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David and will have mercy on them.

Paul's statement in Romans 11:1 agrees entirely. If Paul himself survived the most terrible act of Israel's disobedience and obstinacy, rejecting their own Messiah, then God has not **rejected His people**. Paul's physical existence was proof of this truth. He says, **For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin**. To be **an Israelite** is to be a descendant of Jacob who was renamed Israel. To be a **descendant of Abraham** is to come from his racial lineage. To be a **descendant...of the tribe of Benjamin** is to be a descendant of **Benjamin**, Jacob's youngest son, who fathered the tribe. The mention of **the tribe of Benjamin** is significant because of all the tribes of Israel only one came to the brink of extinction: **Benjamin**. The story begins in Judg 19 with an event that occurred in that tribe strikingly similar to the event that occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah. A Levite was traveling with his concubine and ventured into the Benjamite city of Gibeah to stay the night. When no hospitality was offered they planned to stay in the open square. By evening an older man offered hospitality and took them in to celebrate over dinner and give them shelter. After, some worthless men came to the house, pounded on the door and demanded that the man who came be sent out so they could have homosexual relations with him. In an awful display of injustice, which the Book of Judges is emphasizing, they sent out the concubine and the men abused her all night. By morning she died. The Levite cut her body into twelve pieces and sent one piece to each tribe of Israel as a sign to come and do something about this wickedness committed by the men of Gibeah. The tribes gathered and pressed the men of the tribe of Benjamin to do something about this great wickedness committed by the men of Gibeah. The men of Benjamin would not condemn them and so a civil war began between the eleven tribes and Benjamin. Part of the agreement before the war was that no wives from the eleven tribes would ever intermarry with the wicked tribe of Benjamin. When the Benjamites were defeated there were so few left that the eleven tribes said, "Why O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel." What happened was there were no virgins to marry the few remaining Benjamite men in order to repopulate that tribe. Eventually they solved it in another fascinating chain of events but the point we want to make here is that Paul was from the very tribe that almost went extinct. But if God would not allow that one tribe to go extinct then God would not let any of the twelve tribes go extinct. God will never reject His people Israel.

And so we move to verse 2, **God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew**. This is a different idea than verse 1. Verse 1 only asked about **His people**. Verse 2 is about **His people whom He foreknew**. **His people** is the entire nation Israel but **His people whom He foreknew** is a subset of the nation Israel, namely, the believing remnant. The Greek word **foreknew** is *προεγνων* and means "to have cognitive knowledge in advance" or "to have relational knowledge in advance." Context determines whether cognitive or relational knowledge is in view. Here it means "relational knowledge in advance." God had relational knowledge of the remnant of believing Jews. This is consistent with Romans 8:29 where we read "those whom God foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren..." Those who believe He foreknew. It does not say He foreknew that they would believe. It simply says He foreknew believers. This means that God has relational knowledge of believers in advance. It is something

like David's Psalm 139 where he describes God's intimate knowledge of him with these words, "O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.³You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.⁴Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.⁵You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.⁶*Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it." This is a kind of knowledge that is relational, intimate and limited only to believers. Of course, God cognitively knows all people but he only relationally knows believers. It is that relational knowledge of the believing remnant in Israel that Paul is referring to in Rom 11:2 when he says, **God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.**

Evidence that He has not now comes in the middle of 11:2. **Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL."** Again there is a clear distinction between the nation Israel and the believing remnant. Elijah thought that he was all alone. Why would he think that? Let's turn to the passage Paul is referring to, 1 Kgs 19:10 and 14. 1 Kgs 19 is right on the heels of 1 Kgs 18. What's 1 Kgs 18? Elijah's contest with the Baal prophets at Mt Carmel. And we know the end of that contest. All the Baal prophets, 450 of them were killed. 1 Kgs 19 opens with that news reaching the ears of Jezebel. She was from Phoenicia and she was the one who had imported the worship of Baal and all the Baal prophets into Israel. Now they're all dead so what do you think her countenance is? Not so happy. You read it in 19:2, "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." So Elijah is now going to go on the run and he's going to run south and eventually go all the way to Mt Sinai, that's 19:8, what's also known as "Horeb, the mountain of God." And that's where we find him in 19:9 which was on Paul's mind. "Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He's asking him because He didn't send him there. Verse 10, "He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." Elijah here has an Elijah complex. He thinks he's the only one left in all Israel that is faithfully following God and so what he was doing at Mt Sinai was trying to escape everyone else who was trying to kill him. Verse 11, So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake.¹²After the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.¹³When Elijah heard *it*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He asks again because He had not sent him here. Verse 14, "Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

So again we see that Elijah has an Elijah complex. He probably got the complex through the great defeat of the Baal prophets the week before and so God sets out to show Elijah that God can accomplish his purposes without Elijah and that he's not the only one in all Israel that is faithfully following God. Verse 15, "The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; ¹⁶and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷"It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. So God was going to remove the rest of Israel who worshipped Baal, but, verse 18, "I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." The bottom line is that Elijah was not the only faithful Israelite. There were 7,000 others. All together these constitute the remnant of believing Israel. So the evidence that God had not rejected those whom He foreknew is the presence of a remnant in Elijah's day. God always has a believing remnant.

Returning to Romans 11:5 we could predict what he says next. **In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.** That Paul uses the expression **in the same way then** is a significant linkage back to Elijah's generation. In the same way that there had been a believing remnant in Elijah's day so there was a believing remnant in Paul's day. As we said there is always a believing remnant. The translation of the verse, **according to God's gracious choice**, has led to endless theological dogmatism that the existence of a remnant is due to God selecting individuals in each generation of Jews to believe; what is known in theological circles as sovereign grace. That this is poorly translated can be identified even by someone who knows the difference between nouns, verbs and adverbs and their functions. In the NASB **God** is in italics showing that it is not in the original. **Choice** is translated as a verb but it is a noun in the Greek. **Gracious** is translated as an adverb modifying **choice** but it too is a noun. Finally **according to** for *kata* is quite speculative and imprecise.

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Note the differences in translation when we do a text comparison.

Romans 11:5 in Different Translations				
1890 Darby Bible	The NET Bible	English Standard Version	New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	King James Version
	51.4% DIFFERENCE	54.3% DIFFERENCE	54.5% DIFFERENCE	33.3% DIFFERENCE
Thus, then, in the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace.	Thus, then, So in the same way at the present time also there has been is a remnant according to election of chosen by grace.	Thus, then, in So too at the present time also there has been is a remnant according to election of, chosen by grace.	Thus, In the same way then, in there has also come to be at the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace God's gracious choice.	Thus, Even so then ; in the at this present time also there has been is a remnant according to the election of grace.

I don't study this way. I look at the original and translate it myself. My translation is "In like manner then, also a remnant has come into existence resulting in an election of grace." My translation puts the subject remnant earlier in the sentence and translates *κατα* with "resulting in" and the noun "election" as a direct object and "grace" as a genitive of source, which is the meaning of the text. I'm only putting up the text comparison so you can see the great variety among translations. Darby in 1890 is the closest to correct. It makes **remnant** the subject which is correct and translates **election** as a direct object and **grace** as a genitive of source, which is perfectly correct. The NET makes **chosen** a verb when it is really a direct object. The English Standard Version does the same thing making **chosen** a verb when it's a direct object. The NASB95 makes God the subject when He's not even mentioned in the sentence. The subject is **a remnant**. It then translates **choice** as a verb and **gracious** as an adverb modifying **choice**, but choice is a direct object and grace is a genitive of source. The KJV is pretty good, about as good as the Darby. All this to say that there are some glaring problems in translations that have led to theological speculation.

What Paul is saying is really quite simple. In the same way as in Elijah's day a remnant of Jews has come into existence resulting in their standing as elect on the basis of grace. In other words "elect" is a direct object here. It's referring to a position or standing or status. There is nothing here about God choosing, which would be a verb. It's a noun that refers to a position or standing or status that a remnant of Jews has before God that is sourced in grace. Elect here is something like the word saint. If you have believed you are classified as "a saint" and if you have believed you are classified as "elect." That is all that Paul is saying and to say more than that is to

go beyond what Paul is saying. Other people have noticed this, for example, Sanday and Headlam state, "We must not read into it more than it contains: as, for example, Calvin does. He imports various extraneous ideas..." They are exactly correct. There is nothing here about a before time election unto salvation; only a status of "elect" that is now attained by a believing remnant in the same way that a status of "saint" is attained by a believing remnant or in the same way that a status as "righteous before God" is attained by a believer or in the same way that a status as "son of God" is attained by a believer or in the same way that a status of "reconciled" is attained by a believer. All these and many other statuses are attained at the instant a person believes. Here the believing remnant of Israel is in view and their status as "elect." They acquired this status of being "elect" in the same way that the believing remnant of Israel in Elijah's day acquired it and how anyone acquires it, namely, through faith.

Now the proof that this status is acquired through faith just as every other statement of status in the NT is acquired through faith is in the following two verses where Paul is going to show that it must be acquired on the basis of grace through faith in opposition to works. In view is the classic dichotomy of faith and works as they relate to justification in the NT. Israel as a nation pursued it by works. We know this. It dominates the pages of the NT; Israel pursued it by works but justification is by grace alone through faith alone and never by works. So while the nation as a whole is "elect" only the remnant pursued it by faith and therefore attained the status of "elect of grace."

In 11:6 Paul says, **But if it**, that is, the status of being "elect" **is by grace**, then the status of being "elect" **is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace**. Very simple, works nullify grace. The two stand in opposition to one another and never shall the twain meet. The reason is works, by nature, are meritorious and grace, by nature, is non-meritorious. And if the status of being "elect" is acquired **by grace** then it cannot be by **works**. It's not possible. But, of course, it can be acquired by faith because faith is consistent with grace.

Turn back to Romans 3:22. Paul has already taught us that faith is compatible with grace but neither is compatible with works. "even the righteousness of God through faith." A righteous standing is acquired through faith. 3:24 this justification is "a gift by His grace." So grace must be consistent with faith. Grace is the basis, faith is the means or instrument, righteousness is the result. 3:26, "so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith." Faith is non-meritorious. Therefore it excludes boasting. 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." If Paul and the apostles maintained that a man is justified by faith apart from works I think we all should too because works oppose faith. 4:4 speaking of Abraham in the Book of Genesis, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as grace!" The Greek word translated "favor" is grace. "to the one who works, his wage is not credited as grace, unmerited favor, but as what is due. But," by contrast, verse 5, "to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as

righteousness...” Is faith a work? No, faith opposes works, it’s the absence of work, and as such it is not doing anything because if it did do anything then it would be meritorious and it would contradict grace. But as 4:16 concludes Paul’s masterpiece, “For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace...” Faith is compatible with grace but neither faith nor grace is compatible with works.

And yet as we go back to Romans 11:7 how did Israel pursue it? **What then?** Paul is asking. If it is by grace and no longer on the basis of works how was Israel seeking to establish their status before God? We already know it was by works. He said so in Romans 10:3. Look at 10:3, “For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking,” same Greek word used in 11:7, “seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” They sought to obtain righteousness before God by their own works. But works are contrary to grace and so as 11:7 says, **What Israel is seeking**, a righteousness before God, **it has not obtained, but those who were choice obtained it.** Again, *εκλογη* is a noun, not a verb. It can’t be translated “those who were chosen. The NASB translates takes the noun and translates it as a verbal participle, which is impossible. And further, **choice** is the subject of the sentence. It’s saying literally, “The choice obtained it.” Who are the choice? Those who came to God by the choice methodology which is always faith which is non-meritorious and therefore consistent with grace and these truths are most precious and guarded with great fervor by thousands of passages in Scripture. There is but one way to approach God and that is through faith which is according to grace which is the opposite of works and therefore leaves no room to boast except in Christ and Him crucified. So the **choice** obtained it, **and the rest?** What about them? They **were hardened.** Why were they **hardened?** Because they did not come by God’s preferred method of faith but rather by works and God said I don’t want your works! I don’t accept them. I can’t accept them. Jesus Christ’s work is the only thing I can accept because He offered Himself up as the precious Lamb of God, with pure, spotless blood, undefiled, unblemished. So all the work is already done, it is finished, all that remains is simply to receive it, a valid synonym for believing. John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” See, receiving Him and believing in His name are semantically equivalent. Neither one is doing anything. And as a result of not doing anything but simply receiving Him - believing in His name He gives us the right to become children of God, He makes us newly born. Being a child of God and being newly born are more status reports for all who believe, just like “elect” as a direct object in Rom 11:5. There is nothing difficult here and this fits perfectly into Paul’s argument in Rom 9-11. Why didn’t Israel go into her covenanted kingdom in the 1st century? It’s very simple. They had every advantage you could possibly have but they did not believe. Only a remnant believed and the rest were hardened as a judgment for their unbelief. And hence the nation Israel remains in a state of partial blindness under divine discipline for their unbelief while the remnant remains.

Forster and Marston report, “It is not enough to enter into the elect nation, one must enter also into the election of grace. Israel, apart from the remnant, did not achieve the right-standing they sought, because they sought it

through works and not through faith. Only the remnant who sought it in God's way achieved it. The rest were blinded to the clear indications of the messiahship of Jesus. Because they sought right-standing through works, they "stumbled at the stone of stumbling."¹

Of course, in the main Paul is not talking about individual salvation but of God's dispensational plan for history with Israel first and now with Gentiles. As Dr W. H. Griffith Thomas, designated to be the first president of what came to be Dallas Theological Seminary, but died prior to its establishment, says, "The primary thought of the apostle in these chapters is not individual salvation, but the philosophy of history..." The bottom line is that Israel was cut off from the place of blessing because of their unbelief and now God is working with Gentiles who are coming to belief. As Romans 11:20 declares, "Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief..." And in 11:23, "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in..." The elect nation is temporarily rejected but the presence of the remnant elect of grace shows that they are not permanently rejected and will be grafted back in when they no longer continue in unbelief.

¹ Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History*, p 128.