

# The Results of Israel's Unpardonable Sin

📖 Romans 11:11-15

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 October 18, 2015

🌐 [fbgbible.org](http://fbgbible.org)

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

The weight and difficulty of Romans 9-11 has crushed many an expositor as he tried to navigate the dangerous waters of Paul's argument. The chief solution is the doxological approach which answers the question of the Jew about his nation and the Gentile nations and paints a broad picture about the glory of God which is the crescendo at the end of Rom 11.

We are now in the eleventh chapter of Romans where several themes in Romans 9 and 10 are dovetailing into the glorious picture of God and His purposes for the nation Israel and Gentile nations. To review, last week we gave explanation of the remnant and non-remnant of Israel in 11:1-7. I probably should have gone ahead and explained 11:8-10 since they are OT quotes that support the end of 11:7 where Paul is referring to the non-remnant of Israel as "the rest" who "were hardened." But I didn't and so when we get there we'll have to do a little explanation of what it means to be "hardened."

Let's re-work our way there by starting in 10:21. The statement of 10:21 is a statement of why Israel as a nation didn't come to faith. They didn't come to faith because they were rebellious and obstinate. It wasn't God's fault. God was stretching out to them throughout history but they didn't want Him. 11:1 is asking what God's response is to their not wanting Him. Does God play like humans? Does He reject those who reject Him? Not when it is His people, His covenant people. Paul says, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? "May it never be!" God still has a purpose for the covenant nation Israel. If God had rejected Israel they would be extinct. So Paul himself was evidence that He had not rejected His people. "For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." Paul's heritage from the tribe of Benjamin is a stark reminder that God would never let any of the twelve tribes go extinct. Benjamin had nearly gone extinct about 1200 years before. But they survived because of God's covenant promises. Paul was descended from that tribe. In 11:2 Paul indicates that he was not alone. "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." The people whom He foreknew are the remnant of believing Israel. To foreknow is to know relationally beforehand, to have intimate knowledge of beforehand. The remnant was first mentioned in Rom 9:27 when Paul was referring to the end times and the fact that it would be the remnant that was saved from Israel's enemies into the kingdom. Here he is referring to the remnant at the present time. It's important to understand that "the remnant" always refers to

Jewish believers. It doesn't refer to Gentile believers. People often use it that way but there is no Gentile remnant. The remnant is always Jewish believers. It's this believing remnant that God foreknew and God always has a remnant. In 11:2, the proof that God always has a remnant is traced back to Elijah's day, "Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?" In the context Jezebel was seeking to kill Elijah and he fled for fear thinking that He was the only faithful believer in all Israel. In 11:4 Paul asks, "What is the divine response to him?" Answer, "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." This meant that God was going to spare the lives of this believing remnant when His agents destroyed the Israeli followers of Baal. Paul's point is simple, God always has a believing remnant of Israel. 11:5 says, "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant." The translators have confused things by not allowing you to see that "a remnant" is the subject of the sentence, not a direct object. The original Greek says "a remnant has come into existence at the present time resulting in an election by grace." In other words, in each generation there is a remnant that comes into existence through faith and fills the status of being elect by grace. The elect are created in time and this elect people are the same people in verse 2 whom God foreknew. The status of being elect is acquired by grace and not works. As 11:6 says, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." Grace is the opposite of works because grace is non-meritorious whereas works are meritorious. The status of being elect before God can only be acquired by grace. In 11:7 Paul asks, "What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;" The nation Israel was seeking a righteous status before God but as a whole the nation sought it by works of the Law. Since works are contrary to grace they did not obtain it. Instead, the choice obtained it, not "those who were chosen" which is a participle, but simply "the choice" which is the subject of the sentence, they obtained it. And why? Because they sought righteousness before God by faith alone. The Jews who come to Him in each generation by faith alone are foreknown by God and the remnant and the elect. Paul was a part of that group. And he closes 11:7 by referring to the non-remnant of Israel by the phrase, "and the rest were hardened."

Let's deal with this expression before we move on to vv 11-14. "The rest" who "were hardened" are the non-believing remnant of Israel. It's in the passive voice and the quotes below show that God hardened them. However, this is a case similar to Pharaoh whose heart was already hard before God hardened it because in Mark 3:5 it says that Jesus looked at them and grieved because of the hardness of their heart. So God did harden them but His hardening was due to their first hardening themselves. It's not some kind of arbitrary hardening. When God hardened them it was a penalty for their hardening themselves so as not to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Now the word hardening means "to cause someone to have difficulty in understanding or comprehending." So what happened was the nation had hard hearts manifested by their rejection of the Messiah and so God is now causing them to have difficulty in understanding further truth. You can trace this in the Book of Acts as the Apostle Paul goes from city to city to the Jew first and only after they reject does he turn to the Gentiles. They were not very responsive to the gospel because God had judged them by making it difficult for them to

understand further truth. That difficulty remains today. In 11:8-10 Paul cites several OT passages as evidence that their hardness is a just discipline of God. I don't want to spend time on it since all he's doing is proving from the OT that the non-remnant were hardened. I'll just point out that 11:7 uses the term hardened and that refers exclusively to the non-remnant whereas in 11:25 Paul uses the expression "partially hardened" to refer to the whole nation. So you want to keep those two expressions distinct and understand that one is looking at part of the nation and the other the nation as a whole. So without further explanation I want to press on to 11:11-14.

In 11:8 he cites Deut 29:4 and Isa 29:10 together. Taking up verse 8 **just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."** In the original context of Deut 29 Moses is recounting to his generation all that the Lord did before their eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which their eyes had seen, the great signs and wonders. Then he states these words **"GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."** In other words, Moses' generation witnessed the great signs and wonders the Lord did for them but they did not believe. And as a penalty God gave them a stupid spirit and blind eyes and deaf ears. Paul is quoting it because his generation was the same as that generation. They too saw wonderful signs and miracles of God through Jesus Christ but they did not believe either and so as a penalty God **GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR** and made their eyes blind and their ears deaf. The two generations were essentially the same; they saw great things but did not believe and therefore a penalty was in order. The penalty is described by three phrases. First, **A SPIRIT OF STUPOR** means a spirit of dullness or grogginess. They wouldn't be able to see the truth about Jesus as Messiah. The next two phrases are purpose clauses expressed by the genitive articular with infinitives. They express what would result from God giving them a dull spirit. First, so "that their eyes not see" and second, "so that their ears not hear." They would be blind to the truth and deaf to the truth. That is a general characterization of the nation Israel and as the last expression **DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY** indicates, this was true down to Paul's day and even down to our own day. This is a description of the word "hardened" in verse 7, which is used exclusively of the non-remnant whereas in 11:25 Paul says "partially hardened" to refer to the entire nation of Israel. The entire nation of Israel is "partially hardened" because only a part of it is hardened, the non-remnant, whereas the believing remnant is not hardened.

In 11:9-10 Paul now quotes Psalm 69:22-23. This quote proves essentially the same thing as the previous quote. Ps 69 is an imprecatory Psalm of David.<sup>1</sup> David was God's anointed king but he had enemies that opposed him. In the Psalm David is requesting that God punish his enemies because by opposing him they were opposing God who anointed him. Paul is making application to His generation. This time Jesus was God's anointed King but the non-remnant had opposed Him. Therefore, consistent with the request in David's day that God punish his enemies so in Jesus' day God was punishing His enemies. These enemies are the non-remnant of Israel. David says, **"LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. <sup>10</sup>LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."** This is a strong request for God to punish the non-remnant of Israel because of their rejection of Jesus as the rightful King. The expression **LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A**

**SNARE AND A TRAP** means let their food be poisoned so that it kills them as a punishment for rejecting Him. The expression **AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM** means that the food would be a just discipline for their rejection. In 11:10 the expression **LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT** means let their eyes be blinded to the truth. The expression **AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER** means let them bend over in grief. The word translated **FOREVER** is *δια παντος*. It does not mean **FOREVER** but “continually” through this present age. Paul would not say that God would make the nation Israel bend over in grief forever since later in the chapter he speaks of their final restoration. In the end, the quotes in verses 8-10 teach that the hardening is divine discipline for willfully rejecting their King. The nation Israel will face difficult times during the present age and will be difficult to get through to with spiritual truths. They are partially hardened.]

These verses are preparing us for the analogy with the olive tree and the branches in 11:15ff. In fact, there is very little new in the olive tree and the branches that are not here at least in seed form in 11-14. So what we will establish here will be important for coming weeks. In 11:11 Paul asks, **I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?** The words **I say then** signify a logical inference. Are we to logically infer something from the fact of the hardening of the non-remnant? The word **stumble** is *πταιω* and employs the imagery of “losing one’s footing so as to stumble.” The picture is of the nation Israel losing their footing and stumbling. What happened was the Messiah came and He is the stone of stumbling, they stumbled over Him because when He came He didn’t follow their traditions and they didn’t know what to do with Him and so they were offended by Him and He became the rock of offense. Now did they stumble over Him **so as to fall**? The Greek uses a purpose clause. In other words, was the purpose that they stumble that they may fall? What does it mean for the nation to fall? The Greek word **fall** is *πιπτω* and means “to experience loss of status or condition, *fall, be destroyed.*” In the context the imagery is losing one’s footing and so the picture is of losing one’s footing so as to fall to one’s death. So what Paul is asking is whether the nation’s stumbling over the Messiah was so that they would be irreversibly destroyed, that is, “Has Israel stumbled so as to lose their status as the covenant people of God? Paul’s answer, for the tenth and final time in Romans is, **May it never be!** This is *μη γενοιτο*, the strongest Greek negative. It is a fifth class optative and it means it is unthinkable. This verse alone answers the view of Replacement Theology which says that God is through with Israel as a nation. It is unthinkable that God is through with the nation Israel. Their rejection of Him does not mean His rejection of them.

But in 11b God is going to use their rejection of Him to bring about something else. See, God is sovereign over history and so even a negative choice by the nation Israel God can turn to work together for good. God works everything together for good. And so, rather than the nation Israel going to destruction and losing their status as the covenant people of God **by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles.** Before we look at Gentile salvation the word **transgression** is *παραπτωμα* and it also follows the imagery of one making a false step so as to lose one’s footing. The nation Israel made a false step and lost their footing but not so as to fall from their position of prominence forever. The word **transgression** is also in the singular and preceded by the definite article so that it is one transgression and not just any one but the one. What is the one transgression of

Israel that is so grievous? It is the national rejection of the Messiah in Matt 12. This is known as the unpardonable sin and the unpardonable sin is a national sin committed by the leadership of Israel who led the nation as a whole in rejecting the Messiah. In particular the unpardonable sin is the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. What is the blasphemy of the Spirit? It is slandering the Holy Spirit by claiming that Jesus was doing His miracles by the power of Satan. That was an expression of unbelief and that is the transgression, the one that has resulted in the nation Israel making a false step so as to lose their footing.

Now in the wake of Israel's losing their footing God is using their stumbling to bring **salvation to the Gentiles**. **Gentiles**, of course, could be saved prior to Israel's stumbling, we think of Rahab and Ruth, the Ninevites and others, but the point is that in the OT times salvation was primarily Jewish but now salvation is primarily Gentile. So Israel was in the place of blessing but now Gentiles are in the place of blessing and so the sequence is that salvation until the cross was primarily Jewish and they were in the place of blessing but they rejected their Messiah and so now salvation after the cross is primarily Gentile and now we are in the place of blessing.

Next, note that Gentile salvation is not an end in itself but a means to another end. The expression **to make them jealous** is εἰς + the articular infinitive which signals a purpose clause and should be translated, "in order to **make them** (Israel) **jealous**." In other words, God is sovereign and He is using Gentile salvation in the present age to **make Israel jealous**. The word translated **jealous** is παραζηλω and means "to provoke to jealousy." When Gentiles come to salvation in the Jewish Messiah during this age they have the Jews Messiah and this is provocative. Why would Gentiles have a Jewish Messiah? So the design of Gentile salvation in the Jewish Messiah is that they will come alongside Jews and provoke them to jealousy; that way the Jews are stimulated to consider that Jesus is the Messiah and will come to believe in their Messiah and become a part of the election of grace, the remnant, those whom God foreknew. So the scope of the verse is very wide as far as God's sovereign dealings. First, Israel lost their footing and stumbled over their Messiah, second God used that to extend salvation to the Gentiles and third, the enjoyment of salvation by Gentiles provokes Jews to jealousy so that they become part of the believing remnant during the present Church age.

In 11:12 Paul extends the scope even further saying, **Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!** The **if** is εἰ + indicative, a first class condition, condition of reality and so true and can be translated "since." **Since their transgression** refers once again to the unpardonable sin which was a national sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and indicative of unbelief in the Messiah. This **transgression is riches for the world** or resulted in **riches for the world**. The word **riches** is πλοῦτος and is singular and so should be translated "wealth." The **transgression of Israel** resulted in wealth for the world because if Israel had not rejected but accepted then Gentiles would not presently be enjoying salvation. So the wealth refers to salvation and all that comes with salvation. The next phrase says **and their failure is riches for the Gentiles**. This is semi-parallel to the previous phrase. The word translated **failure** is really the word for "loss," **their loss is wealth for the Gentiles**. It's important to translate the word as "loss" to

understand other parts of the exposition. What the nation Israel lost is not the opportunity to be saved but being in the place of blessing. Now Gentiles have the **wealth** which means they are in the place of blessing. The Book of Acts describes the transition since in Acts 2 it was primarily Jews coming to Christ, this continues into Acts 4 and 6, then Samaritans start coming to Christ and then in Acts 10 Gentiles start coming to Christ. After Paul's first missionary expedition in Acts 13-14 the majority of those coming to Christ were Gentile. So it has become clear by Acts 15 that the wealth of the Gentiles is the fact that they are in the place of blessing and are enjoying the majority of salvation. During the Church age there has always been a believing remnant but millions and millions of Gentiles have enjoyed the **riches** of salvation and all that comes with salvation; namely, the Christian worldview. The Christian worldview has brought many blessings to the world. Look at the difference in the fruit of the Christian worldview and the pagan worldview! The differences are clear.

So if the nation Israel lost the place of blessing such that unprecedented blessing is now coming upon the Gentiles then Paul asks, **how much more will their fulfillment be!** The Greek word translated **fulfillment** is *πληρομα* and contrasts with "loss." It should be understood as "gain." In other words, how much more blessing for the world will their gain be? God promised in Gen 12:3 to bless the world through Abraham. He would do this through Abraham's seed, the Messiah. So if God is blessing the world now through Gentiles who receive the Messiah then how much more will He bless the world when Israel receives the Messiah? The nation Israel will receive their Messiah prior to the Second Advent of the Messiah. They will believe upon Him for righteousness and call on Him for salvation. When He returns to rescue them He will establish the kingdom on earth. At that time the world will experience unprecedented blessing; blessing so stupendous that verse 15 contrasts the future kingdom as life in contrast to the present age as death. It will be that different, it will be that much more wonderful.

In 11:13 Paul says, **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles.** Paul's main message at this point turns to those who are Gentile believers. Since we are now in the place of blessing we may become arrogant against the Jew and Paul does not want this. It is a great fault to become arrogant against the people of Israel. Gentile salvation is not an end, it is a means to an end. Paul says, **Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry.** Prior to his conversion Paul was convinced that Jesus was not the Messiah. When many Jews were believing that Jesus was the Messiah he considered it his Pharisaic duty to arrest and kill those who believed such nonsense. He perceived the large numbers of Jesus believing in Jesus to be a threat to the continued existence of Pharisaic Judaism. In Acts 9 on the Damascus Road the resurrected, ascended Christ appeared to him and he believed. He then commissioned him through Ananias to be an apostle. Because Ananias knew Paul's reputation he was fearful of going before him at Damascus but the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;" The three fold audiences of Paul; Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel are given prophetically in order of priority. Paul's ministry would be mainly to Gentiles. In Gal 2, Paul notes that fourteen years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus in order to present the gospel that he was preaching among the Gentiles to make sure it

was the same gospel that was being preached among the Jews. When this was confirmed the recognition was made that Paul had been entrusted with the gospel to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews. And so they recognized this different emphasis formally. While this might seem to be a blow against Paul that he would have a ministry to Gentiles, in Rom 11:13 Paul says **I magnify my ministry.**

The reason Paul magnified his ministry to Gentiles is stated in verse 14. **If somehow I might move to jealous my fellow countrymen and save some of them.** Paul is employing the same principle of verse 11, that of bringing Gentiles to faith in the Jewish Messiah so that Jews will be provoked to jealousy that Gentiles have a Jewish Messiah and will also have faith in the Jewish Messiah. Paul's view in verse 15 is that more Gentiles that have faith in the Jewish Messiah means more opportunity for Gentiles to provoke his fellow countrymen to jealousy so that they are saved and become part of the remnant. The expression **my fellow countrymen** is simply "my flesh" in the Greek. It shows that Paul was still Jewish flesh even though He was a believer. Just because a Jew believes does not mean that they are no longer Jewish. Racially they are still identified as Jewish, though in all truth they are Messianic Jews or true Jews because they are not only racially Jews but spiritual Jews, having put their faith in the Jewish Messiah. But the big point of this verse is that Paul gloried in his apostleship to the Gentiles because the more Gentiles on the streets who believed in a Jewish Messiah the more opportunity there would be for them to come into contact with Jews and provoke them to jealous because they Gentiles had a Jewish Messiah. Through this perhaps **some of them** would be **saved** entering into the present remnant.

In 11:15 Paul viewed this as having ultimate consequences for one generation of Israel. **For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?** The word **rejection** corresponds to "transgression" in verse 11 and 12. It is singular and has the definite article and thus refers to the unpardonable sin described in Matt 12 as the national sin of rejecting the Messiah by blaspheming the Spirit, claiming that the miracles done by Jesus were done by Satan rather than the Holy Spirit. The word **rejection** is *αποβολη*, a derivative of *αποβαλλω* which means "to throw away." The nation threw their Messiah away. But if that resulted in **the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?** The expression **reconciliation of the world** looks at what happened as a result of Israel's throwing away their Messiah. When they committed the unpardonable sin the ultimate result was the crucifixion of Christ. What God was doing through Christ's crucifixion was reconciling the world to Himself. That means that He was not counting their trespasses against them because the penalty for those trespasses was paid for in full by Jesus Christ. God is no longer angry at the world for their trespasses because through Jesus Christ they were nailed to the cross forever. All that one needs to do is be reconciled to God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We carry this word of reconciliation to the world as ambassadors of Christ. Paul's argument is that if Israel's rejection resulted in **the reconciliation of the world** then **what will** Israel's **acceptance** result in **but life from the dead.** Paul views their **acceptance** as a result of Gentiles provoking Jews to jealousy. What will ultimately happen when the time of Gentile salvation has run its course is all believers will be removed at the rapture; the majority of which will be Gentiles and a small remnant of Jews. At that time the partial blindness of the nation will be

removed and Israel will see that for 2,000+ years Gentiles in the main have been enjoying their Messiah. When they realize that it will provoke them to jealousy and they will accept Jesus as their Messiah. At that time the nation Israel will go from being **dead** to being **alive**. Ezekiel asks, "Can these bones live?" And the answer is given in two phases; first, these bones can come back to physical life as they are gathered in unbelief. That gathering in unbelief has been occurring for the last 150 years as more and more Jews gather in the land by Aliyah; second, by breath coming into the bones by spiritual life when they are gathered in belief. That gathering in believe is still future but certain. At that time they will go from being dead to alive. Isaiah asked, "Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once?" The answer is yes, it will occur during the Tribulation time that the nation will be born. Isaiah is referring to the spiritual birth. So what is happening now is the nation is being gathered physically in unbelief and when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in the Church is removed and at the same time the partial blindness of the nation Israel is removed and they will be provoked to jealousy by all the Gentiles who had their Jewish Messiah for over 2,000 years and this will bring them to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Isaiah asked, can a nation be born in a day? And the answer is yes, it will. And after the nation is born in a day Isaiah says, "Shall I bring the nation to the point of birth and not give delivery?" That is, will I not then deliver them from their enemies and bring them into the kingdom? "Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?" May it never be! For then Israel will call on their Deliverer who will come from Bozrah in glowing red garments to deliver them and to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem over the earth. And from there all blessing will flow forth. As Isaiah says, "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, <sup>11</sup>That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom." <sup>12</sup>For thus says the LORD, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. <sup>13</sup>"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem." <sup>14</sup>Then you will see *this*, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass;" So it shall be, and forevermore!

That's the text of Rom 11:11-15 and Paul will explain this in more detail with the analogy with the dough and the lump and the olive tree and the branches in more detail in coming weeks. But these verses give the basic pattern. Israel was in the place of blessing, enjoying the majority of salvation, but when their Messiah came they committed the unpardonable sin of rejecting Him and therefore Gentiles are now in the place of blessing, enjoying the majority of salvation, but we should not get arrogant because our salvation by a Jewish Messiah is a means to provoking Israel to jealousy so that there will come to be a remnant in the present time and ultimate acceptance of the nation in the future so that the kingdom will come.

---

<sup>1</sup> The imprecatory Psalms are highly controversial because they are godly people calling down God's wrath upon their enemies. They are so controversial that C. S. Lewis considered them to not be inspired Scripture. But they are inspired Scripture.