God’s Chosen Remnant

Romans 11:1–5

“God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. . . . At the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Romans 11:2-5).

Questions regarding God’s promises to Israel could not be avoided once it became clear that many ethnic Jews were rejecting Jesus, the Messiah. That is why Paul chose to devote such a large part of Romans (three chapters) to addressing the issue. Did God fail to keep His Word to the children of Abraham? No, says the Apostle, because the Lord pledged to save the children of the promise—His elect—and not every physical descendant of the patriarch (Romans 9:1-29). Why did so many Jews reject—and why do they continue to reject—Jesus? Because they have pursued righteousness by works and not by grace through faith, thereby stumbling over Christ, the goal to whom God’s law directs us (Romans 9:30 & Romans 10:21).

As we will see in our study of Romans 11, our Creator’s purpose to save the children of the promise through faith alone and not by works opens the door to the inclusion of Gentiles within the covenant people of Israel. However, Paul knows that the teaching of Gentile inclusion will raise questions as to whether ethnic Israel—the Jewish descendants of Abraham by blood—is now irrelevant in the Lord’s plan. Today’s passage gives a resounding “no” as the answer. Though salvation by grace alone through faith alone means that no one is entitled to heaven merely by birth, God has not forgotten the Israel according to the flesh, and one of the clearest examples of that truth is the fact that the author of Romans himself is a Jew by birth. Paul reminds us in Romans 11:1 that he, a Jewish man, has put his faith in Jesus the Messiah, proving that the Lord has not passed ethnic Israel by.

Importantly, the Apostle is not the only evidence of the Lord's ongoing plan for ethnic Israel. Paul turns to the Old Testament and the life of the prophet Elijah to prove that God has always preserved ethnic Israelites for Himself. In Romans 11:2-4, Paul cites 1 Kings 19, where we read of Elijah's lament that he alone remained faithful to God during the reign of Ahab in Israel. The Lord answered the prophet's complaint by pointing out that Elijah, though important in God's plan, was but one of seven thousand men who remained faithful to the Lord. Not all ethnic Israel had abandoned their Creator even in those days of apostasy.

Paul's point, we read in Romans 11:5, is that just as the Lord did in the time of Elijah, He continued to preserve ***a remnant*** of ethnic Israelites in the first century, as exemplified by Paul and many other Jewish Christians. Today, God continues to preserve ***a remnant*** of ethnic Israelites, Jews who have trusted in Christ alone for salvation.