

All of God's glorious promises to Abraham and David will be fulfilled, even though Israel's present rejection has pushed the fulfillment off into the future.

PAUL'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S PLAN (11:33-36)

In a way, this plan is kind of crazy. Why would God ever do things this way, such that Israel rejects and the Gentiles accept, leading Israel ultimately to accept? There must be an easier way. Paul admits it: this plan is not something that humans would have come up with. It could only come from the "depth of the riches of the wisdom of God." And if that's the case, then only God can receive the glory for it. And he will.

CONNECTING TO THE BIGGER PICTURE

These chapters resolve a potential problem in the promises God made to Abraham and David when Israel rejected the very Messiah who was to fulfill those promises. Without Paul's explanation here, some would have been tempted to think that God was finished with Israel and that the nation's rejection of the Messiah ended God's patience with his people. Some might have thought that God would transfer his promises from the people of Israel to the Gentiles. The sad fact is that many Christians today still believe these things, even though Paul was so careful to refute them. God is not finished with Israel because he has not done all of the good things that he has promised. And God never fails in his promises. That also means that we Gentiles can have complete confidence that our salvation in Christ is absolutely secure.

GOING FURTHER

Explore the very practical result of this teaching in Paul's discussion of the stronger and weaker brother in Romans 14-15.

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Come up with your own answer to the question, What is the church? Think about God's purpose for the church in the world today. Passages you might read include Eph 2-4, 1 Tim 3-4, 1 Peter.

THE FAILURE OF GOD'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL (ROMANS 9-11)

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Romans 9-11. Trace Paul's argument concerning whether God's promises can be trusted or not. What does this mean for the future of Israel?

INTRODUCTION

In Romans 9-11 Paul explains God's purposes in the world since his people Israel have rejected Jesus and the church is largely made up of Gentiles.

THE GREATER CONTEXT

The letter to the Romans is a bold statement of the gospel. Paul begins by showing the sinfulness of man, proving that both Gentiles and Jews are guilty and under the condemnation of sin. Thus both Jew and Gentile need salvation and this cannot be earned by obedience to the Law. Salvation comes to all in the same way: God gives his righteousness to all who trust Christ. God's free gift to those who were his enemies means still more: those who have been justified will most certainly be glorified, for God has already done the hard part in sacrificing Jesus and the rest is comparably easy. The believer can therefore have a strong assurance that he is eternally at peace with God, free from the possibility of condemnation. But these very strong promises guaranteeing salvation raise a question: God made promises to Israel that appear to have failed. If they failed in the case of Israel, might they fail in our case as well?

THE OBJECTION (9:1-6A)

Paul does not sidestep the objection, but he meets it head on, insisting that "It is not as though God's word had failed" (9:6). It's true that it appears that God's word has failed, for though God gave Israel the covenants, the law, the temple, and the promises, Israel is now cut off from God (9:1-5). If God's promises to Israel failed, why should the church be confident that God's promises to them will fare any better?

GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE IN THE PAST (9:6B-21)

Paul first observes that God's promises can be fulfilled even if every person does not receive them. Abraham himself had two sons, but the promise was given to Isaac and not Ishmael. Isaac had two sons, but the promise was given to Jacob and not Esau. So one cannot say that the promises failed if God sovereignly chooses to give those promises to some descendants but not all.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE IN THE FUTURE (9:22-29)

Paul then observes that God predicted through the prophets that some of Israel would be saved and some would not. This was part of God's sovereign purpose and it does not constitute a change of plan or a failure of his promises. It was never God's intention to save every person in Israel.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY: WHY ISRAEL FAILED (9:30-10:4)

To anyone familiar with the Old Testament, the events of the two decades before Paul wrote this letter (AD 33-56) must have been shocking. Israel's Messiah was rejected by Israel but Gentiles all over the Roman world were forsaking idols and worshiping a crucified Jewish man. While acknowledging God's sovereignty in the process, one must also wonder what human explanation there is. Paul explains that Gentiles received the righteousness of God because they believed. The Jews, however, did not receive this righteousness because they tried to earn it. They rejected the righteousness that God offered in Jesus and sought to establish their own righteousness through the law. But since they missed the whole point of the law (Jesus), they failed to obtain God's righteousness.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT (10:5-21)

Paul does not want anyone misled into thinking that his explanation is a new teaching. Thus he quotes a dozen verses to show that he is only following the Old Testament. The OT had already revealed that salvation is by faith and that there was no salvation apart from God's appointed means. Israel's refusal to

accept God's message was a reality in the past and in the present. But God had already revealed that he would reveal himself to those outside Israel in order to make Israel jealous. This sets Paul up for the final portion of his argument.

ISRAEL REJECTED? THE REMNANT (11:1-10)

The question remains: Did God reject Israel? Certainly not! Paul himself is an Israelite, so God's word has not failed with Paul. Besides that, there are other Jews who believe. Just as God preserved a remnant of believers in Elijah's time, so now he is preserving a remnant of Jewish believers.

ISRAEL REJECTED? SALVATION FOR GENTILES (11:11-24)

Because Israel rejected its Messiah, salvation came to the Gentiles. But this was not God's last word. God has planned something greater to come out of it. Not only will the Gentiles receive salvation, but the Jews will too. Two times Paul makes a logical argument that if Israel's *failure* led to great blessing, then Israel's *acceptance* would result in even greater glory.

There is a real hidden danger for the Gentiles in light of the present circumstances. They might suppose that they are better than the Jews because they have received God's favor. This could lead to an arrogant attitude resulting in judgment from God. Instead the Gentiles should rejoice in God's mercy and recognize that God can more easily restore Israel (the natural branches) than he brought salvation to the Gentiles (the wild branches).

THE FUTURE: ISRAEL'S SALVATION (11:25-32)

Paul counters the potential arrogance of the Gentiles by letting them in on a little secret: after the full number of God's elect Gentiles are saved, he will save all Israel. The mystery is not that Israel will be saved, for that is abundantly clear throughout the Old Testament. The mystery is the way in which God accomplishes his salvation, *first* by saving the Gentiles through the rejection of the Jews, and *then* by saving the Jews when they appear to have been rejected. How can this be? "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."