

To the Jew First

The book of Romans would be incomplete without a masterful treatise on the plight of God's people, the Jews. Paul provides this treatise in chapters 9-11 of the book. The setting for the story is this: The Jews, God's chosen people, are about to be temporarily displaced from their active role in God's kingdom. Their continued disobedience finally had run its course, and the result was an awful price to pay:

"Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God's offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it" (Rom. 11: 11-12, NLT).

Paul begins by stating God's ability to triumph in spite of the Jews' glaring failure. At first glance, one might conclude that God had failed with His own people. However, Paul reveals that the disobedience of the Jews opened the door for salvation for the rest of the world.

He reinforces his understanding of God's sovereignty by using three Old Testament examples to demonstrate his point: the birth announcement of Jacob and Esau, the story of Pharaoh's wicked rule and the declaration from the prophet Hosea.

From there he continues unveiling God's sovereign plan for bringing the gentiles into the kingdom. He unashamedly announces that the gentiles were not even headed in God's general direction (see verses 30-33). They were not pursuing God's righteousness. According to Paul, the Jews were even further off course, trying to establish their own righteousness.

He sums up by saying that the real issue for both parties was

their dealings with the stone of offense—Christ Jesus. One fell on the stone and was broken; the other was crushed by its enormity and influence.

In chapter 10 Paul revisits the reason for the Jews' diminishing role—their rejection of the Messiah. "But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him?" (Rom. 10:14, NLT).

Paul continues his theme in chapter 11 by asking another rhetorical question: "Has God rejected his own people, the nation of Israel?" He explains that though a deep sleep has settled upon them because of their continued obstinacy, God can easily graft the Jews back into His kingdom. They are still the people He loves because of their ancestral covenant through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

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