

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Rejected?”

Romans 11:1-16

2000

Introduction

There are few experiences more devastating than *rejection*.

Rejection means *the denial of love, acceptance and approval*. In the Greek (Apotheomai) it means to be “thrust away.” At one time we have all experienced being “thrust away.”

More often than not, the deepest wounds were delivered by those from whom we most seek affirmation and approval – our parents, family, spouse, and boss. The ultimate source of affirmation and approval for the believer, of course, is God.

I remember that as a new believer I had serious reason to believe that I had been rejected by God. As a new Christian I found that my life was still marked by sin and compromise and I truly wondered if I might have taken advantage of God’s grace and mercy one too many times. That He would finally say, “Bob, it’s over. You have ignored my Word, violated my commands and spurned the promptings of the Holy Spirit one too many times.”

In chapter 11, Paul addresses the question of whether God has given up on Israel. It was a natural question because the majority of the Jews had rejected the long-awaited Messiah. At the close of chapter 10, Paul quotes several Old Testament scriptures that would seem to prepare us for God’s final and irrevocable rejection of Israel. But fortunately for Israel -- and for us -- this conclusion would be wrong!

I The Evidence That God Has Not Rejected Israel

Rejected = Apotheomai = “To cast away or thrust away [Verse 1]

From a human perspective, the wickedness and rebellion of the nation of Israel would more than deserve God’s complete and permanent condemnation. They had rejected the righteousness of God that comes by faith in the finished work of Christ, and they had rejected God’s patient outstretched arms. Wouldn’t God be justified in forever rejecting such people?

Paul answers his own question with the thundering words, “May it never be!”

Despite Israel's being disobedient and obstinate, the Bible is full of promises from God that He would never forsake his chosen people.

Jer 31:37 “This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.”

Psalms 89:30-34 “If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.”

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

Application: Promises to the believer

Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Philippians 1:6 “... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Matt 28:20 “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

A. The **conversion** of Paul [Verse 1]

Paul’s own conversion was proof positive that God had not given up on the nation of Israel.

Before coming to Christ, Paul was such a ruthless persecutor of the Church that the mere mention of his name struck fear in the hearts of the New Testament believers. He was such a hardened and spiritually rebellious man that God had to knock him off his horse with a bright light, physically blind him and audibly confront him with his open persecution of Jesus. But the outcome of this encounter led to Paul's conversion.

1. He was an Israelite

Acts 22:2-4 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.”

2. He was a descendant of Abraham

2 Corinthians 11:22 “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I.”

3. He was from the tribe of Benjamin

Phil 3:5-6 “[I was] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

So Paul's own conversion was living proof that God had not abandoned or rejected the nation of Israel. It is also proof to us that if God can save Paul, anyone can be saved!

B. The **election** and foreknowledge of God [Verse 2a]

Foreknew = Proginosko = "To know beforehand or foresee"

But in this context, foreknew does not simply mean to be aware of something beforehand but to determine that it will come to pass.

1 Peter 1:1-2 "To God's elect, strangers in the world ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."

C. The **remnant** principle in the Old and New Testaments [Verse 2b-4]

1. The remnant of 7,000 during Elijah's day

Reserved = Kataleipo = "To have remaining"

Elijah had just come from one of the most amazing spiritual power encounters recorded in the Bible. On Mount Carmel he challenged the 400 prophets of Baal to a contest and decisively defeated them. But when Jezebel threatened his life, he ran for his life – approximately 18 miles. Exhausted and discouraged, an angel of the Lord asked him what he was doing there. He responded by saying ...

1 Kings 19:14-18 "He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, ... "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel -- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

Now that is not a big number in contrast to the entire population of the nation of Israel – possibly less than one percent of the population. But imagine what God can do with 7,000 people who are willing to die rather than deny their faith in God!

Application:

Elijah mistakenly came to the conclusion that he was the only one left. The only true believer. Have you ever felt like that in a moment of self-pity?

I have to admit that there have been times, as a pastor, when I have drifted into self-pity, believing that I was the *only one left*! How pathetic! But that is what Satan wants us all to believe. That there are just a few of us! Not so! God in every generation, and in every land has reserved from Himself a remnant who will not bow the knee to any other god and who not serve any other god than the One true God revealed in the Bible.

2. The remnant of believers in Paul's day [Verse 5a]

Remnant = Leimma = "A remainder"

Rom 9:27 "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved."

a. Chosen by **grace** -- not by works [Verse 5b-6]

Chosen = Ekloge = "Divinely elected"

The believing remnant of Jews during Paul's day were not elected by virtue of their spiritual worthiness or good works, but according to God's grace.

2 Tim 1:9 "... [He] saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace."

Eph 2:8-10 "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."

II The Explanation of Israel's Rejection of Messiah

A. They did not obtain **salvation** [Verse 7]

1. Even though they sought it earnestly

Seek = Epizeteo = "To aggressively search for"

The Jews in Paul's day were fanatically religious. Paul described them as having a zeal for God, but a zeal that was not based on knowledge" (Rom 10:2).

Rom 9:31-33 "but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone."

a. But the elect remnant did

Rom 9:30 "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith."

B. They were **hardened** by God [Verse 7b]

Rom 9:17-18 "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

"God's judicial hardening of a man's heart is never separate from that man's hardening of his own heart."

The people of Israel were hardened by God because they persisted in the pattern of works, thinking they could make themselves righteous. God only hardens those whose hearts reject God gracious offer of righteousness.

Hardened = Poroo = "To petrify or to render insensitive"

Illustration:

Petrifaction requires the replacement of living material by silica and other minerals.

Being covered by decaying matter and layers of sediment.

Being exposed to tremendous pressure

Being exposed to this environment for a significant length of time

The application to spiritual matters is fairly obvious. If you allow your life to be dominated by the decay of sin and permit the pressure of the world to squeeze its values into your life for a long enough period of time – you will become spiritually petrified – calloused to the things of God.

1. He gave them a spirit of stupor [Verse 8a]

Stupor = Katanuxis = “A prickling sensation, as of the limbs asleep”

It was used to describe the numbness that results for the sting of a bee or wasp.

Isa 29:10 “The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers).”

2. He gave them eyes that could not see [Verse 8b]

Because Israel refused to see the things of God and rejected His gift of the salvation, God ratified her willing blindness – so much so that she could not recognize her own Messiah and Savior.

Acts 13:27 “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus ...”

Ezek 12:1-2 “... They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.”

3. He gave them ears that could not hear [Verse 8c]

Now clearly, God did not give us eyes and ears to be blind and deaf. Eyes were designed to see and ears were designed to hear. But notice the consequences of rebellion against God: eyes and ears that were ultimately designed to observe and understand the revelation of God are now judicially blinded and made deaf.

Application:

This is the principle: *If anyone hears the truth and does not respond to it, we can actually come to the point where we will be incapable of responding.* If you hear the truth of God’s Word and continue to reject it and harden your heart to it, God will actually allow your heart to become so hard to the truth, that you will be incapable of responding. A very frightening thought indeed.

Isa 6:9-10 “He said, ‘Go and tell this people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

It is so important for this reason, that we always respond to the Word of God every time we are exposed to it.

C. They were “**cursed**” as enemies of the Messiah [Verse 9-10]

This passage, Psalm 69:22-23, is one of the most quoted Messianic psalms in the OT and was a prophetic judgment on the enemies of Christ.

1. May their table become a snare and a trap

a. A stumbling block for them

b. A retribution for them

A place that would normally have been a place of safety, nourishment and joy.

2. May their eyes be darkened so that they can't see

Rom 1:21-22 “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

3. May their backs be bent forever

III The Consequence of Israel's Rejection of Messiah

A. They have not stumbled so as to fall beyond **recovery** [Verse 11a]

Stumbled = Ptaio = “To trip over”

B. Their transgression against Messiah has resulted in:

1. **Salvation** for the Gentiles [Verse 11b]

Israel's temporary loss was the Gentiles permanent gain.

From the beginning, it was God's intention that the through the nation of Israel “all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:3).

But because the Jews as a nation refused to be a light to the Gentiles and rejected their Messiah, God temporarily set the nation of Israel aside “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” (Rom 11:25).

Acts 13:46-47 “Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

a. To make Israel **envious** [Verse 11c]

Provoke to envy = Parazeloo = “To provoke to emulation by bringing alongside”

God's intention was for Israel's jealousy of the Gentiles to be a positive stimulus to draw His people back to Himself.

Deuteronomy 32:21 “I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.”

Illustration:

There are two possible responses when we see God blessing another person, ministry or nation:

1. Jealousy, anger and criticism – Cain, Saul, the Pharisees
2. Emulation – David, Elisha, the Disciples

As a follower of Christ, it is God’s will for you that you should live such a loving, radiant and godly life for Christ that unbelievers will be provoked to spiritual jealousy. Unfortunately, if the unbelieving world sees Christians who are dishonest, immoral, unethical, or ungodly, they will find little to attract them to the gift of Life found only in Jesus Christ.

2. Spiritual **wealth** for the Gentile world [Verse 12]

Riches = Ploutos = “Wealth or abundance”

Col 1:26-27 “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

a. To heighten the fullness of Israel’s salvation

Fullness = Pleroma = This can be understood as the “full number”

If the Lord has used Israel’s rejection of the Messiah to bless the Gentile world, how much more will He bless the world when Israel turns to Him in faith and obedience? In fact, as we will discover next time in Romans 11:26, in the last days “all Israel will be saved.”

IV The Consequence of The Gentile’s Reception of Messiah

A. The Gentiles are a source of boasting for Paul [Verse 13-14]

1. In order to arouse Israel to **envy**

Arouse = Parazelloo = “To provoke to emulation by bringing alongside”

2. In order to **save** some of the Jews

1 Tim 4:15-16 “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

B. The Gentile’s reconciliation is a product of Israel’s rejection [Verse 15]

1. Israel’s acceptance will be like **life** from the dead

Acceptance = Katallage = “Reconciliation or restoration to favor”

In the final days before the second coming of Christ, there will be a worldwide turning to Christ on the part of the nation of Israel. The transformation will be so dramatic that it can only be described as like *life from the dead*.

2. Israel's remnant makes the whole nation **holy** [Verse 16]

Holy = Hagios = "Sacred or set apart"

1 Cor 7:14 "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

By the way, believers are never referred to as sinners in the Bible but as *hagios*, or saints. You will never find Paul addressing his letters to, "the sinners in Philippi or the sinners in Ephesus."

a. The firstfruits of the grain harvest

Firstfruits = Aparche = "A beginning of sacrifice"

Num 15:17-21 "The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat the food of the land, present a portion as an offering to the LORD. Present a cake from the first of your ground meal and present it as an offering from the threshing floor. Throughout the generations to come you are to give this offering to the LORD from the first of your ground meal.'"

b. The root of a tree

In speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, John the Baptist said, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Matt 3:10

Paul references the firstfruits and the root to describe the initial harvest of the Jewish nation of Israel. The firstfruit was Abraham, but in the last days the full number of the Jews will be harvested for the glory of God.

Conclusion

1. Unbelievers:

If you have never received the gift of salvation in Christ and would like to, God will not reject you. He is calling you and wants to have a reconciled relationship with you. But He will not force Himself on you. He will forgive your sins and give you new life only if you are willing to repent of your sin, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and confess His as Lord of your life.

2. Believers:

What's the spiritual condition of your heart? Is it soft toward God? Are you quick to hear and respond to His voice? Or has it become hardened as a result of sin and the pressure of the world? Jesus Himself said that "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28

Are you willing to hear His voice today and follow Him?

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