

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

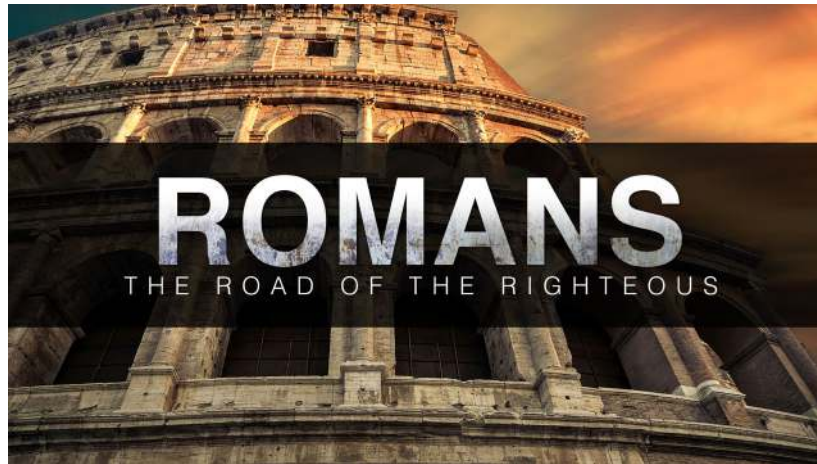
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 11:11-24

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

July 28, 2019



Theological questions. I'm sure you have a list of sorts. I do.

- Why does God move so slowly when it comes to dealing with the wicked?
- How does God not take immediate action when He witnesses a major crime occurring?
- Why do some Christians, who have followed God so faithfully throughout their lives, suffer in a prolonged fashion at the end of their lives?

I could go on, but I'm sure you get the point. We all have questions as we read the Word of God, study theology, and then seek to integrate all of this with daily life. Sometimes it fits perfectly, while at other times it leaves us quite mentally perplexed.

This situation adequately describes how the Jews in the church of Rome responded to teaching of Paul about the gospel of grace secured by the Messiah, Jesus, through His substitutionary death and glorious resurrection. If sinners, whether they were Jew or Gentile, were, as Paul said, justified by faith in Jesus in God's holy courtroom, then, by definition, this led Jews to posit a whole host of honest questions.

Paul, being skilled in speaking with Jews, anticipated these questions because they always arose when he taught about salvation by faith alone. In chapters nine through eleven, he stops and answers those questions so the Jews could better understand God's redemptive plan and purposes. In chapter 11, starting with verse 11, we run into the eighth question Paul addressed. Here is a listing of the other questions for your review, but for our purposes in this study we will be focused on eighth query.

Jewish Questions Naturally Arose From Paul's Teaching About The Gospel Of Jesus (Rom. 9-11)

- *Question #1: Does Israel's spiritual failure and rejection of the Messiah nullify God's national promises (Rom. 9:6-13)?*
 - *Answer: No, because God sovereignly and unconditionally chose Israel.*
- *Question #2: Do God's precise choices demonstrate He is unjust because He did not choose everyone (Rom. 9:14a)?*
 - *Answer: No, because His character pulsates with righteous purpose (Rom. 9:15-18). Remember He did not chose every family member of the Patriarchs to compose His chosen people, just select ones. In so doing, He blesses some . . . apart from their works, and does not bless others. Yet in all of this sovereign choosing, God continued to work out His purpose for mankind.*
- *Question #3: Since God chooses to bless or curse, how can He hold us accountable (Rom. 9:19-21)?*
 - *Answer, No, we freely act and God freely acts.*
- *Question #4: If God is just, why does He react slowly to sin (Rom. 9:22-29)?*
 - *Answer #1: God Has His Purposes (Rom. 9:22-23). He has distinct purposes toward the lost and the saved, between non-Christians (v. 22) and non-Christians (v. 23).*
Answer #2: God Has His Plans (Rom. 9:24-29). He has specific and strategic plans towards Gentiles (vv. 24-6) and Jews (vv. 27-29).
- *Question #5: What is the relation between God's election and man's free will (Rom. 9:30-10:21)?*
 - *Answer #1: The Gentiles Freely And Favorably Responded To God (Rom. 9:30).*
 - *Answer #2: The Jews Freely And Unfavorably Responded To God (Rom. 9:31-10:13).*
- *Question #6: What if Jewish people had no idea salvation is through faith in Christ and not loyalty to the Law (Rom. 10:14-21)?*
 - *Answer #1: You (Jews) Have Heard About The Gospel (Rom. 10:14-15).*
 - *Answer #2: You (Jews) Willfully Choose To Reject The Gospel (Rom. 10:16-17)*
- *Question #7: Has Israel's historical pattern of sinful disobedience to God caused God to be finished with them as His people (Rom. 11:1-10)?*
 - *Answer #1: Nothing Thwarts God's Redemptive and Retributive Plans (Rom. 11:1-10).*
 -

In the first eleven verses of chapter 11, Paul spoke candidly about Israel's historical penchant for working against God instead of walking with Him. This, however, did not mean the entire nation disregarded God. Far from it. Even though the majority of the nation rejected God and His teachings, along with His prophets, there always was a small remnant who loved, feared, and followed Him with great faith. This contextual tension and historical reality logically lead to the next question:

Question #8: Has Israel's Sinful Ways Made Her Unredeemable (Rom. 11:11a)?

As we consider this question, followed by Paul's intricate answer, please stop and realize a few things, especially if you are a Gentile: One, God cares about your questions and is not afraid to hear you articulate them. So, go ahead, ask Him, and then sit back and watch Him give you much needed flashes of rare insight. Two, even though these three chapters focus on Jews does not mean there it not something here for Gentiles. As you consider their positive or negative reactions to God's leadership and light, I'm sure you will readily see yourself in bold relief if you are honest.

With this said, let's dig into the contextual question at hand:

¹¹ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?

The opening conjunction, *then, oun* (οὐν), forces us to link what Paul is going to say with what he just said in verses one through eleven.

Not long after God miraculously delivered them from Egyptian bondage they started questioning and arguing with God. The words *complain* or *grumble* best describe their response to His leadership in the desert (Ex. 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 11:1, 12:2). As we learned in our last study, toward the end of the northern and southern kingdoms one truth sadly rang true: the people willfully chose to reject true prophets, because they did not like what they had to say, while opting to embrace false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear (Jer. 2:6-8; 6:14; 8:11 to cite a few passages among many). A nation is well neigh unto the judgment of God when its leaders, at all levels, choose falsity over truth, darkness over light, and injustice over justice so as to placate and please the people so they can remain in power. Historically, Israel stumbled all over the way God pointed them to walk, choosing rather to walk in their own wickedness. True, there was always a remnant who loved and followed Him, but the majority lived for twisting or outright rejecting His teachings in order to enjoy the pleasures of sin. They stumbled all the time in their walk with God. Of course, their ultimate point of stumbling occurred when they rejected Jesus as the true Messiah, despite all of miraculous actions He performed to verify His prophesied identity (Isa. 35:5-6; 42:7, 16, 18). Paul's words here harken back to what he already said about this sad state of spiritual affairs in Romans 9:31-33 and 10:3.

Because Israel had, as a nation, rejected their Messiah, this naturally led any thinking Jew to wonder, "Paul, did our national stumbling over Jesus put us in a position where we are spiritually unsalvageable, unredeemable?" Paul's answer is, once again, as forceful as it gets in Greek:

May it never be! (or μή γένοιτο in Greek).

Paul has said repeatedly there is no way God can ever forget His chosen people, Israel. Yes, He has judged them nationally for rejecting the Messiah, but this does not mean His divine rejection is permanent. It could not be because of reasons stated thus far, plus more He will supply in the verses before us.

Let us all sit up and take notice of Paul's teaching here. From it we learn this wonderful, amazing, grace-filled truth, a truth which permeates the ensuing verses: *Sin doesn't thwart the redemptive plan of God, especially where His people are concerned.* That is probably worth reading again, especially if you struggle with the sin you have committed. You, too, might be thinking, "God, after what I've done and how I've lived, I'm sure there is no way you will ever accept me or desire a relationship with me." If you are thinking this, realize this is contrary to God's character. He is holy, which means He hates sin, but He is also merciful and loving and willing to forgive (Deut. 7:9; Psalm 111:4).

Israel had stumbled in the most profound fashion when they turned on Christ; however, from Paul's perspective this did not mean God was finished with the nation. Far from it. On the contrary, Israel's vile and sometime vicious unbelief served to reveal that God still had/has a plan for them. In the ensuing verses, Paul shows us this plan as he provides three answers to his opening question.

Answer #1: Her Sin Points To Ultimate Belief (Rom. 11:11b-15).

God's ways, as Isaiah said some eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, are certainly not our ways and thoughts (Isa. 55:9). This truth is certainly proved in verses 11 through 15 where Paul makes this jaw-dropping observation:

¹¹ But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

God used the transgression, or willful rejection of the Messiah, by Israel as a fulcrum to bring salvation to the Gentiles, who, in turn, became part of a new entity called the Church, which was/is composed of Jew and Gentile believers. This, of course, was a mystery which was revealed through Paul's teaching in other writings (Eph. 3:1ff). Interesting. God took Israel's unbelief, as tragic as it was, and used it to redeem Gentiles so they, in turn, could make Jews jealous of their newfound faith relationship with the Messiah. Wow.

Charles Feinberg, a former professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Talbot Seminary, and one of my favorite authors, was saved by the witness of a faithful Gentile woman. To make sure his family did not do any work on a given Sabbath, Dr. Feinberg's father hired this woman to work at their house on Sabbath. From the very beginning Charles watched this woman work and he also became acquainted with her. After some time, he learned of her Christian faith, so he began posing spiritual questions to her. Some she answered, while others were beyond her proverbial pay grade. What did she do? She put Charles in contact with Dr. John Solomon, who happened to be the head of the American Board of the Mission to the Jews. It did not take long for Dr. Solomon to answer those perplexing questions of Charles, resulting in him placing his faith in the Messiah, Jesus. And to think it all started with Charles watching this Christian Gentile woman work and wondering, "What is so different about her?" That jealousy, that desire to have what she had led him to the feet of Jesus, the Savior.

You must stop and ask yourself: Does my demeanor, does my personality, does the way I work, does the way I love my mate and children, and so forth, does all of this cause Jewish people to desire a faith relationship with Jesus? Or is the opposite true? God has temporarily sidelined Israel as a nation, but in the meantime He is all about using Gentiles to reach Jews by their Christ-like example. I pray that is true of me, and you as well. More precisely, I pray it is true of how we all live before all people when we leave this house of worship. Our lives should be so Christlike they cause the lost to want what we have.

Moving from this teaching about divinely arranged jealousy, Paul makes another interesting observation:

¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ¹³ But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of

them.¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?

Paul's words here are just, well, utterly amazing.

Israel's national turning away from the Messiah has led to the salvation of countless numbers of Gentiles . . . and Jews as well. Their national loss, in a word, has become our gain. Yet, Paul wastes no time stating that the richness of Gentilic conversion will be eclipsed in the future when the nation turns to God, as prophesied (Zech. 12-13). Timewise, we know from prophets like Zechariah that the nation will, in fact, recognize their Messiah when He returns at the end of the seven-year tribulation. What a day that will be when that occurs, when they embrace Jesus in faith and He fulfills His prophetic word to give them new hearts to love and follow Him (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:35-39; Ezek. 11:18-20; 16:60-63; 37:26), coupled with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to give them the ability to honor and serve God as never before (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:27). Truly, that day of national redemption will be as if the dead spiritual nation has come to spiritual life. And how blessed will the world be when the Jewish Messiah reigns in the Millennial kingdom over the throne of David, and His nation, along with His Church, rules and reigns along with Him in a kingdom overflowing with everything which is missing today:

- The kingdom will be known for righteousness (Isa. 46:13; 51:5; Psalm 72:7).
- Holiness will permeate the kingdom, as opposed to ungodliness now (Isa. 4:3-4; Ezek. 43:12; Zech. 14:20-21).
- Truth not falsity will be the order of the day (Psalm 96:10; Zech. 8:3).
- Justice will replace injustice (Isa. 9:7; 11:5; 32:16).
- Jesus will teach all peoples His ways while residing in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-5).

This is just a very short list of the radical changes which will occur when Israel, as a nation, turns from unbelief to belief in the Messiah, Jesus. No wonder, then, Paul states triumphantly, "How much more will their fulfillment be."

For now, however, we live at the time of Israel's national rejection of the Christ. But this is only a temporary reality, which God is using to bring Gentiles and Jews into His Church. One day, Jewish national unbelief will be replaced when after enduring the judgments of the tribulation, after hearing from the evangelistic voices of the converted 144,000 Jews who speak and witness during the tribulation (Rev. 7), and after listening to the two Jewish witnesses in the middle of the tribulation (Rev. 11), this time of Israel's refining will consummate with the glorious return of the Messiah to deliver them in the most spectacular fashion (Rev. 19). How great are the ways of God toward sinners.

A second answer equally establishes the theological fact that God is not finished dealing with the nation of Israel.

Answer #2: Her Teachings Point To Ultimate Belief (Rom. 11:16).

¹⁶ If the first piece of *dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

Paul utilizes two word pictures here all Jews were familiar with in order to demonstrate how their sin had not annulled God's desire to deal with them as a nation in the future.

The first graphic image deals with bread. God instructed Israel when they entered the land of Canaan to give God the first fruits of their harvest by giving Him a section of their first bread cake. Moses detailed this command in Numbers chapter 15:

¹⁷ The LORD spoke to Moses: ¹⁸ Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land into which I am bringing you ¹⁹ and eat of the bread of the land, you shall offer the LORD a contribution. ²⁰ A round loaf from your first batch of dough you shall offer as a contribution. Just like a contribution from the threshing floor you shall offer it. ²¹ Throughout your generations you shall give a contribution to the LORD from your first batch of dough (Num. 15).

The point could not and should not be missed: Since the small piece of bread was holy, the rest of the bread was holy as well, or set apart to God. With the second graphic, Paul taps into the concept of the olive tree. All Jews identified with this particular tree which grew all over Palestine and provided not only food, but a source of oil for practical, theological, and medicinal purposes. This tree also served as the picture of the nation according to the prophets (Jer. 11:16-17; Hos. 14:6). Paul takes this tree and makes an important and highly logical point: the roots of a tree are directly related to the branches of the tree; hence, from a theological perspective, if the roots are holy, then the branches are holy.

What do these two graphic images connote? The first piece of bread and the roots of the olive tree represent the godly patriarchs who listened to God, trusted in God, and who were used of God to found the nation. The larger remaining lump, along with the branches, represent the Jewish people. Since, therefore, the patriarchs were set apart for God to be His people, the rest of the people are, by definition, set apart for God as His people. True, this did not mean they could not be temporarily judged, disciplined, and set aside, but the mere fact they were directly related to the patriarchs through whom came the unconditional promises for national blessing means God can, and never will, completely finish with them as His people.

Many in our world today should stop and take note, shouldn't they? How quickly some of our politicians and educators on university campuses run to denigrate Israel and portray them as an evil people, a real blight upon the world. The thinking is quite clear from people like this: If Israel is just cordoned off or removed then we will have peace and prosperity. The opposite is true for God has promised He has great plans to bless the world when the rest of the bread and the branches come to have faith in the future like the patriarchs. I don't know where you stand today, but if you are jumping on the "get Israel" bandwagon, I'm here to warn you that you are on the wrong wagon. That wagon leads to divine displeasure and discipline for you are working against God's providential purposes regarding His true chosen people. Perhaps a little confession might be in order, don't you think?

Moving on to verse 17, we encounter Paul's third answer as to why Israel's sin did not cause God to totally abandon them as a people. Before we look at these verses let me be candid with you. These verses are highly complex, theologically speaking. Many of my commentaries simply by-passed the thorny theological ramifications of this section, while others stated positions which are theologically inconsistent. I do not believe I have all the answers to these problematic verses, but I do think I have some insight. My viewpoint, however, is not without its own issues, and I'll be the first to admit this. The problem related to several questions:

- Do these verses denote a believer? If so, it appears they can lose their salvation if they don't evidence enough faith.

- Do these verses represent the Church? If so, does this mean that unbelief can cause God to cut the Church out of His program?
- Is Paul speaking here about unbelieving Gentiles in general who decide to turn against God as Israel did and trash His truth(s)?

I will attempt to answer these questions, but please do not let these side question cause you to lose focus of Paul's main, over-arching answer here about Israel's place in the plan of God:

Answer #3: Her Unbelief Points To Ultimate Belief (Rom. 11:17-24).

Put differently, Paul argues here that Israel's national unbelief will eventually turn into national belief, which is a concept he will explore more fully starting with verse 25. For now, he is merely paving the way or this fuller discussion by pointing out how Israel, as natural branches from the national olive tree of God, were cut off because of unbelief, but will be re-grafted into the tree in the future.

As Paul is accustomed to do, he gets a little sidetracked here from this main supportive point as he gives two words of warnings to Gentiles. Here is his first cautionary word:

Be mindful in your belief during their unbelief (vv. 17-22). First, let's read the text and then come back and offer some insights:

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

These are complex words, as I said. To begin, let us understand that Israel was broken off of the main national olive tree. Their unbelief caused them to lose the privileged position as inheritors of the Abrahamic promises. Non-Jews, or Gentiles were, then grafted in. These branches were "wild" olives branches, or unproductive ones. In the Middle East, an aging olive tree had to have new, fruitful branches grafted in occasionally to make it healthy and fruitful. Here, God does the unthinkable. He took the wild branches and grafted them into the tree after he removed the unbelieving Jewish branches. This action shows His power to take the spiritually dead Gentiles and make them living and fruitful. What grace.

What is Paul's counsel? If you are one who was/is grafted in, then don't be conceited. Don't think that you are better than the Jews, ever. Don't think you don't owe them anything, you do for they were the ones who brought us the patriarchs and the Messiah. Don't think they are nobody and you are somebody. Don't look down upon them as you are superior and they are inferior. Why? They were part of the original olive tree which represented the nation. You are, by God's grace, a wild branch which is enjoying a special relationship designed originally for His people, Israel. Are you guilty? Do you belittle them? Do you have negative thoughts about them? Do you think you have a corner on spiritual truth and they are the losers because they rebelled

against God historically? Don't be conceited because God isn't finished with them. And don't ever forget that since He removed them, He can remove you too because, after all, you're just a wild branch.

Now, the question is, "Who does this counsel apply to?"

Do these verses denote a believer? If so, it appears they can lose their salvation if they don't evidence enough faith. I have a hard time with this position for it flies in the face of everything Paul has said about salvation being related to justification by means of faith. How many sins, before an absolutely holy God, would it take for you to lose your position in the tree? Just one. But didn't Paul say that we who are saved by faith are not condemned anymore (Rom. 5)? Did Paul not say that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8)? Indeed. So, I don't think Paul's warning here is to individual believers who have to maintain a constant faith walk or they are sawn off the tree and lost for all eternity.

Do these verses represent the Church? If so, does this mean that unbelief can cause God to cut the Church out of His program? Again, I think this is impossible since the Church is the bride of Christ and it will be with Him in glory (Matt. 9:15; 25:1-12; Rev. 19). In addition, the Church is the temple of the Spirit of God, and that same Spirit has sealed forever those who are saved (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:25-32; 2:21). In light of these truths, it's hard to see the Church becoming so apostate the Lord cuts her out of His plan. He can, and will discipline her, which is what we see in the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia minor. But discipline for sin is a far cry from cutting her from the main tree trunk and discarding her.

Is Paul speaking here about unbelieving Gentiles in general who decide to turn against God as Israel did and trash His truth(s)? In the context of the tree analogy, Paul is speaking about Abrahamic promises which flowed first to the Jew and then to the Gentile when Israel resisted God's wooing. For the moment, then, Gentiles, as a people, have a unique opportunity to be part of God's tree of potential Abrahamic blessing; however, if/when they embrace unbelief and push back against God's redemptive plan and provision, then they are cut off the tree as unbelieving Jews were. Paul, then, isn't necessarily speaking about salvation here, but about the special privilege of being a recipient of those Abrahamic promises. If you, as a Gentile, embrace unbelief, like Israel did, then prepare for God, who is stern and severe toward sin, to act accordingly and cause you to miss out on those promises. A problem, however, for this position is the fact that the Gentile branches are part of the tree by means of faith (v. 20).

Of these views, I lean more toward view two, and then to view three. View one is out for me because it wedds salvation to works, which serves to diminish justification by faith. As I step back from the views, I do think no Gentile, saved or unsaved, should miss Paul's warning here: It is highly unwise to think you are better than the Jewish people, and even worse to oppose them. Why? Because they are God's first chosen people and He is certainly not finished with them. If you don't believe that, then you will be divinely paid back for your unbelief in the here and now and in the hereafter.

A second word of warning follows the first.

Be watchful in your belief during their unbelief (vv. 23-24). Paul's words here drip with hope for the Jewish nation:

²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

In this verse, Paul, who understood the promises to the Old Testament prophets concerning Israel, informs us that Israel will not always stay in a state of unbelief where the Messiah is concerned. No, he is convinced that one day they will come to believe in Him, as Zechariah said they would (Zech. 12-13), and at that point God will re-graft them easily back in to the olive tree. Why is it easy for God to do this in the future? Paul's answer is clear as it is concise:

²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree?

He will do this at His glorious and ominous Second Coming. In the meantime, we should be watchful over our hearts, making sure we do not become unbelieving concerning God's plan to save Israel. We should eschew elitism, and embrace humility where the Jews are concerned, for in due time God is going to bless the entire world in and through them.

One day a learned Russian Jew by the name of Joseph Rabbinowitz traveled to Israel to purchase land for other Jews. Before he left, someone slipped him a copy of the New Testament told him that it served as the best guide to understanding the layout of the land and Jerusalem itself.

After spending a few days touring the town, he went up to the Mount of Olive to rest. Sitting there he thought to himself, "Why are my people persecuted so?" With that question, he opened up the New Testament in his hand and began to read about the person and work of Jesus. Much time elapsed as he read page after page. His soul soaked up the water of life he found on the pages. Looking up at one point to the distant hill of Calvary, he discovered the answer to his query, "My people are persecuted because we rejected our Messiah." With that he cried out to the Lord as he raised his hands toward heaven, "My Lord and my God.

Joseph went up the hill a lost Jew cut off from the olive tree of God. He went back down the tree a saved Jew grafted into the tree of all trees. He was, and is, but a small taste of what will happen in the future when the Jewish nation, by and large, turns to the same Messiah in faith. What a day that will be.

Prior to that I must ask you, "Are you part of the tree called God's people?" It doesn't matter what sin you've committed, or how wickedly you've behaved, *for nothing thwarts the redemptive desire of God to save even you.*

