

## Castaway Nation?

The Future of Israel – Part I

Romans 11:1-6

### Introduction

Frederick the Great was the King of Prussia – a territory which is now modern day Germany and Poland. He ruled from 1740 to 1786. Frederick was heavily influenced by Voltaire, the French philosopher and atheist. As a result, he became skeptical of Christianity and of the reliability of the Bible. He said to his chaplain, “If your Bible is really true, it ought to be capable of very easy proof. If it is indeed from God, you should be able to demonstrate the fact simply, without complicated arguments. Give me proof for the inspiration of the Bible in one word.”

One word to prove the reliability of the Bible? If you were asked that, what one word would you choose to prove the reliability of scripture and, consequently, the reliability of God? Love? Sin? Grace? Guilt? Conscience?

After a moment or two of thought, the chaplain thought of one word that all the world could see as remarkable proof that God was reliable and His word as well.

“Your Majesty,” he replied, “I can give you the proof you ask for in one word.”

Amazed, the king asked, “What is this magic word that carries such a weight of proof?”

The chaplain answered, “Israel.”

Frederick the Great responded only with silence.<sup>i</sup>

Let that sink in for a moment. Israel – proof of the reliability of scripture and the Author of scripture? Brilliant answer!

Think about it – what nation has lasted four thousand years? We know when the nation began, why, and by whom. We have detailed written records of her ancient and modern history. Her language remains the same, as well as her religion, her traditions, her homeland, and her bloodline. She still follows the original documents that outlined her faith – the Torah – the Old Testament law. Surely for a nation to exist for so many centuries, it must have been pampered and protected by the world, right?!

That is, however, what makes the survival of Israel even more miraculous and divinely overshadowed. No nation has been so robbed, so deported, so murdered, so hated. In:

- 722 B.C., they were decimated by the Assyrians;
- 586 B.C., the capital, Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Babylonians;
- 538-432 B.C., groups of exiles returned like homing birds to rebuild Jerusalem;
- A.D. 70, the nation was destroyed, Jerusalem razed to the ground, the population fled;
- the next 1800 years, they were scattered throughout Europe and Asia; Jerusalem and the homeland were the scene of hundreds of years of conflicts; it was ruled off and on by Turks, Muslims, and Western powers;
- 1940, the Holocaust killed millions of these scattered Jews living in eastern Europe and Russia;
- 1948, the Zionist movement re-established Israel as a nation;

- 1967, they regained control of Jerusalem except for the Temple Mount.

And every day, in the news, we hear reports about what nation? Little Israel.

Even without the modern developments, however, the King of Prussia had to agree – Israel was a miraculous proof of God’s reliability in keeping His word.

Where are the Assyrians? Where are the Perizzites, and the Hittites, and the Amalekites, and the Jebusites, and all the other mosquito bites?

No other nation has survived four thousand years of wars and destruction and deportation and genocide and persecution; the repeated destruction and rebuilding of the capital city.

Why has Israel survived? Because God said it would. It proves the reliability of the scripture and the reliability of God!

Through His prophet Jeremiah, God said,

***[Only] If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth be searched out below, . . . will I cast off all the offspring of Israel . . . (Jeremiah 31:37)***

In other words, until the universe is mapped and the center of the earth is explored, Israel will not cease to be a nation.

Every time you pick up a newspaper or turn on the television and look at another daily story about Israel, marvel!

That does not mean that everything Israel does is right. In fact, it is, I believe, presently set aside under the discipline of God, throughout this church age, as we will study in the near future.

But until the universe is mapped and the center of the earth is explored, Israel will survive as a nation!<sup>iii</sup>

## **Has God Cast Israel Aside?**

Something has happened now, however, and Israel has gone too far! Surely now, God will wipe Israel off the face of the earth.

The Israelites did not just kill the prophets – they called for the death of The Prophet! They did not just reject the messengers, they rejected the Messiah!

Surely God has had it up to here – and He is through with irreconcilable Israel!

That seems to be the way Paul is leaning in Romans, chapter 10, verse 21.

***But as for Israel He says, “All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”***

The question on everyone’s mind would be, “Since the Messiah was rejected by the nation Israel, is God finished with Israel?”

That is the question that opens our study of Romans, chapter 11. Notice Paul anticipates that question, so he clearly spells it out in verse 1a.

***I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! . . .***

Is God through with the nation? Does the nation and its blessing and covenants simply get a spiritual make-over and get applied to the church in some sort of spiritual manner? Is there to be no literal throne in Jerusalem? Is there no literal restoration of the nation in their homeland?

All of these things are part of the covenant promises to Israel – and they will literally occur – because God said they would.

One author writes,

*Contrary to what some sincere Christians maintain, God cannot be finished with the nation of Israel – for the obvious reason that all of His promises to her have not yet been fulfilled. If God were through with His chosen nation, His Word would be false and His integrity discredited. Among those who most strongly insist that God is through with the nation of Israel are those whose theology is commonly referred to as covenant theology, which is ironic because they cannot escape the implication that God is not faithful to fully honoring His covenants.<sup>iii</sup>*

In other words, they are called covenant theologians, which is ironic because their interpretation views God as choosing not to literally honor His covenants!

Listen to what God said through David about His covenant promises to Israel.

***My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever . . . (Psalm 89:34-37a)***

Covenant theology teaches that Israel is morphed into the church; that circumcision is spiritualized into baptism; that the Old covenant feasts are spiritualized into the Lord’s supper.

Are there similarities? Yes. Are they covenant replacements? No.

Romans, chapter 11, should forever turn us away from the presumption of those who would teach that God is “through with national Israel – that it has no future as an elect nation. . .”<sup>iv</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Paul gets a little riled up at the thought of it. Look again at Romans, chapter 11, verse 1a.

. . . **God has not rejected His people has He?**  
. . .

The antecedent of “His people” is the previous paragraph – the nation Israel. The word translated “rejected” is “apotheo (*αποθεω*),” which means, “to cast aside, or to discard”.

*Paul is asking, “God has not discarded the nation, has He?”*

Paul then answers, in verse 1,

. . . **May it never be!** . . .

God forbid! That is impossible!

Perhaps you are thinking, “So what? What does that have to do with me?”

If you are asking that question, you are obviously not Jewish.

The significance is this – if God does not literally keep His word to His chosen nation, how can you know He will keep His word to you?

Are we not His chosen people too? If God has had it up to here with Israel and says, “That does it! That’s the last time you’ll sin against Me! Everything I covenanted I’d do, well, I just changed My mind – no land, no kingdom, no throne!”

That is what we say to our kids when we finally reach that point – “That does it! No dessert, no allowance, no telephone, no sleep over . . .”

I do not know why those things came to mind!

If God ever takes back one little part of His covenant with Israel, we are all in deep trouble – in more ways than we have time to count.

Ladies and gentlemen, God cannot keep only some of His promises; God cannot be partially reliable.

My pick-up truck is partially reliable. It is approaching 190,000 miles! Two weeks ago, a new challenge began – every time I pulled up to a stop light, the needle on the temperature gauge would immediately begin to rise. I thumped the glass on the front panel – that is my idea of auto repair; that is all

I can do. I waited two weeks to see if it would heal itself – it did not. I took it to my friend Greg, at his shop, and they fixed the problem.

I am not expecting any promises from my truck. Every day is a risk of reliability.

The truth is, most things in our lives are not entirely reliable. From computers to washing machines to cars to jobs to relationships – we are surrounded by unreliable things and unreliable promises.

But not God, right?! If God is only partially trustworthy, we are in trouble, right?

If God changes His mind about Israel’s homeland, maybe He will change His mind about your heaven!

So, is this a significant question or what?!

I love Paul’s answer,

. . . **May it never be!** . . .

In other words, “There’s no way!”

## **Two evidences that Israel is not a castaway nation**

Now, Paul goes further and gives two evidences that Israel is not a castaway nation.

### **Paul’s personal testimony**

1. The first piece of evidence is found in Paul’s personal testimony.

Paul says, “God hasn’t cast Israel aside – look, He chose me!”

Notice verses 1b through 2a.

. . . **For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.**

In other words, if God decided to get rid of the Israelite after they rejected the Messiah, why would He choose an Israelite like me to be His apostle?

It is interesting to me that Paul points to himself as exhibit A. Would you notice the three things he says about himself?

- First, Paul says, “I too am an Israelite”.

It is interesting that he does not say, “I am a Jew,” or “I am a Hebrew.” Let me insert an explanation of these names here, so you can appreciate Paul’s choice of words. There are three names used for this people:

- Hebrew – probably derived from Eber in Genesis 10:21;
- Jew – a name derived from Judah, the most prominent of the twelve tribes;
- Israelite – a name taken from Father Jacob, who was re-named Israel by God. This is the covenant name of the people, signifying their unique relationship with God.

Notice, by the way, Paul did not say, “God chose me and I am no longer an Israelite!”

This is the term Paul uses here. It is as if to say, “Listen, God hasn’t rejected His covenant with Israel – look at me, God did not reject me and I am an Israelite.”

- Notice further in this verse, Paul goes on to say, “I am a descendant of Abraham.”

Abraham was the father of the nation and the one to whom God delivered His covenant.

- Look even further in the verse, where Paul writes, “I am of the tribe of Benjamin.”

Paul was a direct descendant of Jacob’s son Benjamin – the only son born in the land of promise.

It is as if Paul is reminding his readers, “Listen, there is no one more connected to the covenant than me . . .

- I was born into the covenant family – an Israelite;
- I am related to the covenant founder – a son of Abraham;
- My ancestors were born in the land of the covenant promise – a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

This is Paul’s personal testimony, “You can’t get any more Jewish than me; any more Hebrew than me; any more Israelite than me! But God did not reject me – He saved me! And I was saved by grace.”

### **Evidence of a past trial**

2. Now Paul delivers another piece evidence that God had not cast away the nation. Not only is there evidence in a personal testimony, but secondly, there is the evidence of a past trial.

Paul writes in verse 2b,

*. . . Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?*

Notice the use of the word, “against”. Elijah is praying against Israel. He is tired of their disobedience and their idolatry. He is tired of Ahab, the faithless king of Israel, and Jezebel, his wicked wife.

Listen to Elijah’s prayer, that Paul quotes in verse 3,

*Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.*

Can you hear the pain in Elijah’s voice? Can you hear the frustration and weariness that went all the way to his bones?

Elijah is ninety miles from nowhere. He is alone in the wilderness – depressed, defeated, afraid.

Yes, he has just come from Mount Carmel, where the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed his sacrifice.

Yes, the false prophets of Baal are humiliated and later executed.

Yes, the people have shouted until they are hoarse, “The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God.”

Yes, rain has fallen after three years, in answer to Elijah’s prayer.

However, instead of a national revival, there is continued rebellion.

Jezebel does not respond by saying, “Elijah, I knew you were right. I’m sorry, and I repent of my idolatry. Listen, I want you to start a Bible study in the palace.”

Instead, she puts out a contract on his head and promises that he will be dead by the next night!

Elijah runs for his life.

Paul takes his readers back to that moment when Elijah prays again and, in effect, says, “Lord, I don’t know about You, but I’m tired of Israel. I’m sick and tired of their idolatry and their unbelief. *I’m the only one left* that believes in You, Lord. You might as well start over again, and form a new nation.”

Notice verse 4.

*But what is the divine response to him? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”*

“Oops! I thought I was the only one.”

“No, you’re one of seven thousand other men who have refused to worship Baal.”

That is not to even mention women and children.

“You have no idea, Elijah, what I have kept by My grace – this remnant of believers which constitutes true Israel.”

### **Summary statement of the evidence – Israel is not a castaway nation, by God’s grace**

Now Paul ties up all the evidence with a summary statement. Notice verses 5 and 6.

*In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*

There is that theme of his again – grace! How Paul loved that truth. He wrote in:

- Romans 1:5 – *“through [Him] we have received grace . . . for His name’s sake”*
- Romans 3:23-24a – *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace . . .”*
- Romans 5:1-2a – *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .”*
- Romans 5:20 – *“. . . where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”*

And on and on and on.

This is all a matter of God’s grace.

- Israel was chosen and preserved by grace.
- Elijah was encouraged and re-commissioned by grace.
- The believer is still saved, not by works, but by the grace of God.

## **Application**

Before we close our study in this text, I want to draw out several reminders to take to heart.

### **Do not ever underestimate the power of your personal testimony!**

1. First, do not ever underestimate the power of your personal testimony!

I find it fascinating that Paul could have said a lot of things to prove that God had not forsaken the nation, but he used his personal testimony as evidence of the grace of God.

When you share your faith with those around you, you will not know all of the answers – you just happen to know The Answer.

You need to, in fact, remember a couple of things as you share your faith with others:

- People you witness to know more about their religion than you will ever know.

If you wait to be an expert on world religions, you will never engage anyone with the gospel.

- People you talk to may know less about God than you can imagine.

This is especially true today. When you talk to an American about God, there is no telling what they understand about who He is. You may have to start at the beginning.

- People you talk to struggle more with their sin than they want to admit.

I was at the mall some time ago, waiting on some of my kids. I was sitting on a half wall that was used as a planter and also made a nice seat. A man was standing nearby and I recognized his distinguished features. I asked him what part of India he was from and we struck up a conversation. I asked about his religion and it became obvious that he was well studied and passionate about his belief. There was no way I could ever answer point by point, as I simply did not know enough about it. I was desperate for some penetrating question for this philosopher to chew on; something that would cut through his smiling stubbornness that any claim of one path to God was ludicrous, but nothing was coming to me. At last I asked him, not really knowing what his answer would be, “Do you have peace that your sins have been forgiven.”

His whole countenance changed. He suddenly became transparent, hung his head, and said, “No.”

I was able to say, “I have peace that mine are forgiven . . . and let me tell you how.”

Do not ever think it is a sign of ignorance to share your testimony with anyone. If the brilliant apostle Paul could do it over and over again throughout his letters, so can you.

What your unbelieving friends, co-workers, family, and neighbors need, more than anything perhaps, is not only the demonstration of your faith

through holy living, but a declaration of your faith, through your own personal testimony. Start with that!

Do not ever underestimate the power of your personal testimony!

### **Do not ever underestimate the insight from your past trials!**

2. Secondly, do not ever underestimate the insight from your past trials!

Like Elijah, we determine whether or not God is doing something based on what we can see, rather than what God has said. We tend to let our experience cloud God's promise.

Elijah's problems began when he focused on Jezebel instead of Jehovah.

Are you in the middle of a trial right now? Do you remember the last one? What did you learn? Maybe the last trial was intended to help you through this trial. Do not forget the insight God provided.

Write the insights from past trials down and keep them handy. Like David who kept Goliath's armor, go back and look at them from time to time and remember the grace of God in your life.

### **Do not ever underestimate the power of God's grace!**

3. That leads me to one last reminder. Do not ever underestimate the power of God's grace!

If Israel was not beyond the reach of God's grace, no one is. Not you . . . not anyone!

Did Israel deserve God's grace? No.

Did Paul, the hunter of Christians, deserve grace? No.

Did you or I deserve the light of God's grace? No.

None of us deserve God's grace. If we did, as Paul wrote in verse 6, grace would not be grace! Grace is undeserved favor – and only the undeserving get it!

There was a mother who knew her son would have a hard life, following his father's pagan footsteps. She was frail, but a believer. She depended on the grace of God, and she knew her son would deeply need it too. So she spent time teaching her little boy Bible verses, which he memorized, as well

as hymns, which she taught him to sing. She prayed that God would save her son.

She died when Johnny was only seven years old. He was sent to a boarding school, which he ran away from. He then lied about his age, so he could join the Navy. He ran as far away from His mother's God, His mother's Bible, and His mother's hymns as he could. He eventually ran from the Navy, into a deeper life of sin.

On the night of October 9, 1748, John was jolted awake by a brutal storm that had descended so swiftly that the crew was unprepared. All that night and into the following day, he was convinced he was going to die at sea. He remembered his mother and her tears in prayer, the hymns she taught him, and the verses of Christ's death and resurrection. He cried out for salvation.

John eventually prepared for ministry and became well known throughout his homeland of Great Britain. He also added his own original hymns to the collection. His most famous one was entitled, *Faith's Review and Expectation*. One verse that was dropped over time reads,

*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, Who called me here below,  
Shall be forever mine.<sup>v</sup>*

In other words, God will keep His word! To Israel . . . and to you!

No matter what circumstances seem to say; no matter how dark and stormy the night, God will keep His word. God will never retract from you His covenant of grace.

That hymn I mentioned a moment ago has become perhaps the most well know hymn in all the world. Its title, *Faith's Review and Expectation*, was later changed to fit the theme of each stanza. The new title was, *Amazing Grace*.

John Newton considered it his personal testimony, put to music. So did the apostle Paul before him, and so should you and I.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/31/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Holman New Testament Commentary, Romans (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), p. 329.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur Jr., Romans, Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 92.

<sup>iv</sup> William R. Newell, Romans (Moody Press, 1938), p. 410.

<sup>v</sup> Robert J. Morgan, Then Sings My Soul (Thomas Nelson, 2003), p. 79.