

“WHAT GOD HAS NOT DONE (AND CANNOT DO)”
ROMANS 11:1-6

Rejection is hard. No one wants to be rejected and most people don't like telling people, “No.” Sometimes saying, “no” is unavoidable, though. For instance, editors regularly have to tell authors “no” to book or article ideas. Here is how Brian Doyle, editor of the University of Portland's *Portland Magazine* learned to say no —

Thank you for your lovely and thoughtful submission to the magazine, which we are afraid we are going to have to decline, for all sorts of reasons. The weather is dreary, our backs hurt, we have seen too many cats today and as you know cats are why God invented handguns, there is a sweet incoherence and self-absorption in your piece that we find alluring but we have published far too many of same in recent years mostly authored by the undersigned, did we mention the moist melancholy of the weather, our marriages are unkempt and disgruntled, our children surly and crammed to the gills with a sense of entitlement that you wonder how they will ever make their way in the world, we spent far too much money recently on silly graphic design and now must slash the storytelling budget, our insurance bills have gone up precipitously, the women's basketball team has no rebounders, an aunt of ours needs a seventh new hip, the shimmer of hope that was the national zeitgeist looks to be nursing a whopper of a black eye, and someone left the toilet roll thing empty again, without the slightest consideration for who pays for things like that. And there were wet towels on the floor. And the parakeet has a goiter. And the dog barfed up crayons. Please feel free to send us anything you think would fit these pages, and thank you for considering our magazine for your work. It's an honor. –Editors [[Letters of Note](#)]

Now that's a creative way to let someone down easily. But even when done with gentleness, rejection hurts. But there is a kind of rejection that is much worse than a “hurt” — it is the rejection that comes from God that leads to eternal condemnation and wrath from Him. There is no way to gauge or measure that kind of infinite terror. And that's the fear that the apostle Paul anticipates in Romans 11. Israel has rejected God (10:19, 21); does that mean that God will then reject Israel? Paul answers unhesitatingly, “No!” God's people may have rejected Him, but that does not mean that God has rejected them. He made a promise to be their eternal God, and He will not and He cannot renege on that promise.

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GOD IS FAITHFUL TO KEEP HIS PROMISES WITH ALL HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.

In these verses Paul offers five demonstrations of God's faithfulness to Israel (and to all His people).

1. **God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in Paul's SALVATION (v. 1)**
2. **God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in God's Choice of ISRAEL (v. 2a)**
3. **God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in Elijah's Vain REQUEST (vv. 2b-4)**
4. **God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in God's Current REMNANT (v. 5)**
5. **God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in the Nature of GRACE (v. 6)**

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In these verses Paul offers five demonstrations of God's faithfulness to Israel (and to all His people):

1. God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in Paul's SALVATION (v. 1)

- The **people** Paul is concerned about in verse 1 is the nation of Israel — “people” typically refers to a people group or a community; the reference to Israel is obvious. Why is Paul concerned?
- This letter has repeatedly affirmed that Israel rejected God (2:5, 23-24; 9:3, 31-32; 10:1-3). It is that theme that Paul is addressing when he says, ***I say then*** — he is particularly looking back at 10:20-21. The end of chapter 10 is particularly strong (10:20-21). Israel has repudiated God and is natural to assume that God in turn has rejected Israel. That's what man (we!) would do. Is God like that?
 - ✓ The very way that Paul asks the question anticipates a negative answer: “No, God has not...”
 - ✓ And then he is even emphatic about that negative answer: ***may it never be!*** The phrase indicates an idea that is abhorrent to Paul; he has the strongest aversion to it: “may it never come to pass!”
 - ✓ He cannot tolerate such a thought (cf. 6:2, 15; 7:7; 9:14). That idea is outrageously wrong.
 - ✓ The rest of this section (vv. 1-6) provides several reasons why this idea is so wrong.
- Paul's first demonstration (proof) that God hasn't rejected Israel is his own salvation:
 - ✓ Notice the word ***for*** (“because”) — here is a reason that he can say God hasn't rejected Israel.
 - ✓ ***I too am an Israelite*** — Paul has trusted in Christ, but he is still an Israelite by birth and still has assurance of the covenantal promises of God to Israel.
 - Not only is he an Israelite, but he is a ***descendent of Abraham***. Not only is he not a Gentile, but he is also not through the line of Ishmael or Esau; he is from the promised line of Isaac and Jacob. He is within the covenant of promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.
 - He is also from the tribe of ***Benjamin***. Benjamin was the tribe from which the first king, Saul, came. And Benjamin was a favorite son of Jacob (along with Joseph). But Benjamin was also beloved by God (Dt. 33:12). And Paul was within that beloved tribe — if anyone was a Jew, then Paul was. He was a Jew among Jews (2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5-6).
 - ✓ Here's his point — he is a Jew, and he has been redeemed. If he were the only Jew to ever be saved by God, it would be proof enough that God hadn't rejected Israel. And even more, if God could (and did) save Paul, then He could (and would and did) save other Israelites too (1 Tim. 1:15-16).
- Paul's salvation means that God did not (and could not) reject His people. There is hope for Israel. There is hope for all people that God will be faithful to fulfill His promises.

2. God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in God's Choice of ISRAEL (v. 2a)

- Paul's second demonstration that God has not rejected Israel is based on the very character of God.
- Some have suggested that this verse serves as the theme for this entire chapter. Paul's statement is simple, clear, and concise. His meaning is unmistakable, and it is repeated throughout the chapter:
 - ✓ There is a remnant (v. 5)
 - ✓ They did not stumble in a way that made them fall out of God's blessing (v. 11a)
 - ✓ There will still be fulfillment of God's promises for them (v. 12)
 - ✓ The hardening of the Israelites was for the purpose of grafting in Gentiles (v. 25; cf. v. 11b)
 - ✓ The Deliverer will come and take away their sins and show them mercy (vv. 26-27, 30)
 - ✓ No wonder Paul exclaims God's glory in his benediction in vv. 33-36.
- On what basis does Paul say that God has not rejected Israel?
 - ✓ God has not rejected Israel because He *foreknew* her. That is the same word that Paul used in 8:29 to refer to the salvation of individuals — it refers not just to “knowing,” but to active choosing.
 - ✓ But Paul here uses the word to refer not to individuals, but to the nation of Israel — God “foreknew” — predetermined and chose Israel alone to be His unique, covenantal nation.
 - ✓ This relationship is affirmed in the OT (Amos 3:2 — *chosen* = “known”). God has made a covenant, and He cannot reject or nullify the covenant.
 - ✓ Paul also seems to be alluding to Ps. 94:14 and 1 Sam. 12:22 (cf. also Jer. 31:37); no matter what the nation has done or will do, God will not (and cannot) change His promise to Israel. It is not in the nature of God to break promises; God is incapable of being unfaithful to a promise.
- It has been noted that —

No message of Scripture is clearer or repeated more often than the unqualified declaration that God can be trusted, that He is the very source and measure of truth. By definition, His divine Word is absolutely trustworthy. Whatever He says is true and whatever He promises comes to pass....

God's character and integrity, His trustworthiness and faithfulness depend on His continued preservation of Israel. God has obligated Himself to ultimately redeem the nation of Israel and to establish her as a purified and glorious kingdom above all others in the world. [MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 92-3.]

- ✓ God is faithful to His promises. He cannot be unfaithful to His word (promises) or to His nature. Once He has chosen someone (a nation or an individual) he cannot un-choose him. In secular adoption, it is possible to terminate the adoption and return the child to the state. In biblical election and adoption, the choice and adoption of the nation of Israel and the choice and adoption of the individual believer is irrevocable. God is incapable of rejecting His people. They are safe.

3. God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in Elijah's Vain REQUEST (vv. 2b-4)

- Paul asks another question in v. 2, but this time he anticipates a positive response: “You do know what the Scripture says about Elijah, don’t you...?” This was a well-known story (1 Kings 19:10, 14); one of the meanings of the story was to affirm God’s faithfulness to Israel.
 - ✓ Elijah saw how the nation rejected God in her false worship and he **pleads** for Israel; ironically, the word usually is to make an appeal on behalf of someone, but Elijah is pleading *against* Israel.
 - ✓ Elijah seems justified in his appeal —
 - **They have killed Your prophets** — they rejected the messengers of God’s word
 - **They have torn down Your altars** — they rejected God’s singular form of worship (and further complicated their problem by engaging in idolatrous worship).
 - Though Paul doesn’t quote it, Elijah also says they **have forsaken Your covenant** (19:10) — they have not believed Him and they have rejected His means and promise of salvation.
 - This rejection by Israel in the OT was now repeated in an ultimate sense with the rejection of the greatest Prophet, Jesus (1 Thess. 2:14-15).
 - ✓ We think Elijah’s point is justified — they are rebelliously, obstinately sinful and God should just forget about and lay aside His promises to them. But that’s not what God says.
- Paul uses a strong contrastive in v. 4 and then says, **but what is the divine response?** This is the only time that phrase “divine response” is used in the NT. We would expect something much simpler like, “God.” But Paul uses this unique term that refers to the location and position of God — “He is uniquely deity and awesome in power and glory.” It is to say, “God in Heaven has spoken with great authority...”
 - ✓ We tend to read God’s response as something of a correction of Elijah’s self-absorbed despondency. “Hey, Elijah, don’t fret; there are others with you — in fact, there are still 7000 believers...” That element is certainly contained in the answer, but that’s not what Paul emphasizes.
 - ✓ Paul does not directly quote from 1 Kings, but paraphrases, **I have kept for Myself**. In that statement, he adds the emphasis **for Myself**.
 - God is the one who **has kept** the 7000. They exist and remain because of His action for them. They have been preserved from false worship of Baal by God’s act (it was His grace).
 - God has preserved them **for Himself** — i.e., for His glory. The preservation of a remnant in Elijah’s day and the preservation of Israel as God’s covenant people is a way for God to demonstrate His greatness and glory. He is a faithful God to us and to Himself.
- What is particularly ironic about this story is that Elijah who was so righteous that when he prayed it stopped raining for 3-1/2 years (Js. 5:17) had his prayer for the rejection of Israel rejected. Elijah’s request was rejected because it was an ungodly and vain request. God cannot violate His promises.

- “...God’s preservation of a remnant is not only evidence of his present faithfulness to Israel; it is also a pledge of hope for the future of the people.” [Moo, *Romans*, 677.] It is also a pledge of hope for all people who are saved by Him. We don’t need to bother asking God to reject Israel; it was a vain request by Elijah and it is just as vain today — for the sake of His glory, He will preserve His people.

4. God’s Faithfulness is Demonstrated in God’s Current REMNANT (v. 5)

- There *is* a correspondence between the stories in Elijah’s day and Paul’s day, but it is not with the rejection of God’s people. It has to do with the opposite of rejection — the preservation of remnant.
 - ✓ ***In the same way*** points to the correspondence Paul wants us to see.
 - There was a rejection of God in both Elijah’s day and Paul’s day.
 - There was also a preservation by God in both Elijah’s day and Paul’s day.
 - What God was then, God still was in the day of Paul (and still is today, too). He was not through with the Jews in Elijah’s day and was not through with them in Paul’s day (or our day).
 - ✓ So Paul says, ***there has come to be...a remnant...*** They did not come into existence on their own power, but someone (God) caused them to come into existence — it was by His gracious act.
- Even while the nation as a whole rejected God in both Elijah’s day and Paul’s day, there were still people who believed and followed God in both days. God has always had those who believed — a remnant:
 - ✓ It was true in Noah’s day (Gen. 6:1-8).
 - ✓ It was true in Lot’s day (Gen. 19:29).
 - ✓ It was true in Isaiah’s day (Rom. 9:27; cf. Isa. 10:22ff).
 - ✓ It was true throughout this letter to Rome (9:6ff; 9:18a; 10:4, 11, 16; 11:14, 24, 25).
 - ✓ God has always had a remnant who believe; that remnant is a reminder that He is not only preserving people, but He is also being faithful to Himself. And He will be faithful to every promise He has ever made. He has not rejected His people; even when they rebel against them, He preserves individuals from the rejecting nation of Israel. And He will still keep His promise to the nation one day (11:26-27, 31).
 - ✓ God is merciful and has remembered His mercy.
- When we look at rainbow (and I saw a really cool one from 35,000 feet recently), we think of the promise of God not to flood the entire world again. Similarly, whenever we see an Israelite follower of the Messiah (a member of the remnant), we should remember that God will be faithful to His promise to Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah. He has been and will be gracious to save His nation.

5. God's Faithfulness is Demonstrated in the Nature of GRACE (v. 6)

- Paul ends v. 5 by pointing to God's faithfulness as an expression of His *gracious choice*.
 - ✓ He has *chosen* ("foreknown" in v. 2) His people, Israel.
 - ✓ That choice of Israel is a gracious choice. Paul is even emphatic — *if* (v. 6) is a certain condition, "since." There is assurance in this sentence. God's choice *is* by grace, and since it is, it cannot be by the work of man (but must be by the work and faithfulness of God).
- Once someone comes to see that God's preservation of His people is by grace, *it is no longer on the basis of works* — that is, we can no longer think of salvation as by our works. Salvation *is* by works, but it is only by the work of Christ and the work of the Father in sending the Son, not our works.
- Salvation and the preservation of Israel cannot be by works, *otherwise grace is no longer grace*.
 - ✓ If salvation is by works, then what we receive from God cannot be called grace (cf. 4:4-5, 16).
 - ✓ This is the repeated theme in Romans: cf. 1:5; 5:2, 15, 17, 20. Everything we have is by grace.
 - ✓ Salvation is from God, by God, and for God. It is all His monergistic work. We contribute nothing to our salvation (except our sin that needs redemption).
 - ✓ And since salvation is by grace (a free gift), that also means that God will keep His people in that salvation by grace as well — His faithfulness is an expression of His grace.
 - ✓ God has graciously made a promise to Israel and He will graciously keep that promise to Israel.
 - Israel is preserved (she is not rejected).
 - Israel is preserved solely because of God's grace.
 - ✓ The truths in these verses are also true of God's relationship to all who are His:
 - Every believer in Christ is kept and preserved by God (He does not reject His people)
 - Every preserving act of God is by grace alone. And that is tremendously hopeful!
 - God has not rejected Israel. He cannot reject Israel. The nation will be saved. (And we are similarly safe when we are in Christ.)

CONCLUSION: Paul doesn't ask this question, but there is one more question that needs to be asked: "Are you being preserved by God?" That is, "Are you a believer in Christ? Are you His follower?"

If you are not, can I point you to one verse that this section is based on? Look at 10:21 — if you are not obedient, God is holding open His arms for you to come to Him in repentance and faith. Turn away from your sin (reject your sin of rejecting God) and trust in Jesus' death to pay the penalty for your sin and to remove the power of sin from your life. If that's what you believe, you (with Israel) will never be rejected by God.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36