

WHAT HAPPENED???
ROMANS 11:7-10

I suppose that the most asked question in the universe is “why?” Because 2-4 year-olds ask that question so many times, no other question gets asked more often. But perhaps the next most-often asked question is, “what happened?” As in,

- ✓ “I just received this month’s credit card bill. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “Did you see the game last night? *What happened?*”
- ✓ “I just pulled the souffle out of the oven and it fell. Again. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “I just had one of your cookies. They’re perfect. Again. *What happened?* (How do you do that?)”
- ✓ “I just heard about your doctor visit. You seem so healthy. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “The poll results are in on the election. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “I just heard that they got engaged. I didn’t even know they were dating. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “That storm came so suddenly and the devastation is so terrible. *What happened?*”
- ✓ “Son, you were two hours late coming in last night. *What happened?*”

All those questions (and hundreds more like them) tell us that there are perplexing things all around us — things that don’t make sense to us. And that kind of perplexity is what motivates Paul to write what he does in **Romans 11:7-10**. He has just reminded the Romans (and us) that God has not rejected Israel as His covenanted people. Yet Israel *did* reject God. And the natural question is, “what happened?” Why did Israel reject God and what happened to Israel when she rejected God? And what do we learn about God in the process? The way Paul asks the question is, **what then** (v. 7)? What should we think about God, His promise not to reject Israel, and the obvious rejection of God by Israel? *What happened?*

Paul is continuing to develop the same theme we saw in last week’s passage:

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO KEEP HIS COVENANT WITH HIS CHOSEN NATION, ISRAEL.

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

How do you explain Israel’s failure to believe if God has not rejected her? In these verses, the apostle Paul provides three explanations of what happened to Israel and the promise of God to redeem Israel:

1. What Happened? Israel’s **REBELLION** (v. 7a)
2. What Happened? God’s **GRACE** (v. 7b)
3. What Happened? God’s **HARDENING** (vv. 7c-10)
4. What Happened? Lessons **LEARNED**

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO KEEP HIS COVENANT WITH HIS CHOSEN NATION, ISRAEL.

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

In these verses Paul provides three explanations of what happened to Israel and God's promise to Israel:

1. What Happened? Israel's **REBELLION** (v. 7a)

- Israel was **seeking** something. In fact, the term **seeking** refers to an interest and desire in something that is strong and overwhelming. Because of this desire, they put out maximum effort to achieve the desire. They were serious in their efforts.
 - ✓ I might say, "I want to play the piano like Brenda or David L." You would then say, "what have you done about it?" "Nothing. I'm really not interested in the practice and discipline; I just want the benefit of playing the piano without the hard work." That's the exact opposite of this word.
 - ✓ This word is maximal effort and diligence and pursuit.
 - ✓ So the question is, "what were they seeking?" Paul doesn't say it in this verse, but he's already said it clearly throughout this letter, and even in this section (chs. 9-11).
 - ✓ They were seeking righteousness. But they wanted *their own righteousness* (10:2-4).
 - They did have a zeal for God — they wanted to know God and be known by Him (v. 2)
 - But they wanted God on their terms — they sought to establish their own righteousness (v. 3a)
 - In fact, they were unwilling to submit themselves to the righteousness of God (v. 3b)
 - They were unwilling to embrace Christ as their righteousness, even though He provides righteousness for everyone who believes (v. 4)
 - ✓ They wanted righteousness, but they were **seeking** their own form of righteousness.
 - ✓ What did that pursuit look like? Just look to Jesus and remember the resistance He received from the Pharisees and religious leaders: they wanted their Sabbath practices, and hand-washings, and tithings of herbs and spices as their righteousness (e.g., Jn. 9:16; Mt. 15:1-2, 7-9; Lk. 11:37ff). And they were unwilling to accept any kind of righteousness provided by Christ.
- Because Israel sought her own righteousness, her seeking was disobedience, rebellion, and rejection of God. Because she was rebelling against God, she was unable to **obtain** what she desired.
 - ✓ There was no success for Israel in her pursuit of righteousness. She didn't get it.
 - ✓ And Paul has reiterated this theme throughout this book (2:17, 23-24; 3:9; 9:2-3; 9:31).
 - ✓ There is no one that is righteous on his own; no one can do enough to please God. There is none that is righteous, no not one... (3:9ff).
 - ✓ If you are attempting to be good or you think you are good enough, hear the account of Israel. The best-positioned people in the world failed to be righteous. They didn't obtain and neither will you.

- So what happened to Israel? She had the right motive, but she pursued it in the wrong way — she pursued self-righteousness, and she never made it. God was willing to be found by her, but only if they pursued His provision of righteousness.
 - ✓ Be careful here. This doesn't mean, "God is so self-absorbed that He is unwilling to accommodate the desires of others." Don't take this to mean that Israel was ok in its pursuit and God is just mean.
 - ✓ For God to mandate that Israel must pursue and accept His provision of righteousness is to say that their righteousness is not only inadequate, but that *there is nothing righteous about their righteousness*. The prophet says their righteousness is like **filthy rags** (Is. 64:6). And God has provided for them the righteousness they could never accomplish on their own. It was a *grace gift*.
 - ✓ Friends, that's the way God always operates; His righteousness is a *gift*, which is the next point...

2. What Happened? God's GRACE (v. 7b)

- In this verse, Paul is making a distinction between three groups of people:
 - ✓ When he uses the term **Israel**, he is referring to the nation — the corporate group, all of Israel — "the nation, as a nation — an entire entity." This was the group that received the Abrahamic promise and the covenants that flowed from that one promise. And this is the group that has not received the fulfillment of the promises — it was *the nation that has not obtained*.
 - ✓ Then Paul also talks about two groups of individuals:
 - **those who were chosen** — as we will see in a moment, these are saved individuals.
 - **the rest** (those who were not chosen), the ones who became **hardened**.
 - ✓ The nation, at the time of Paul's writing (and still today), had not received the full promises made to Abraham, but that promise would yet be fulfilled (11:26). However, while the nation has not received the promises, God is demonstrating His faithfulness to the nation by saving individual Israelites along the way (**the chosen**). Not everyone is saved, but the fact that *some* are saved reveals that God has not rejected His people and He has not rejected His covenant.
- So what about these individuals who are chosen? Who are they?
 - ✓ The term **chosen** is also translated, "elect." It refers to those individuals that God has selected, designed, purposed, and chosen to be saved. It is the same word that Paul used about the nation of Israel — that God had chosen Israel from all the other nations to be His people (11:5; Dt. 7:7-9; Amos 3:2). This is also the word Paul used of individuals that God chose to be saved (Rom. 9:11).
 - ✓ This electing and choosing was what Paul personally experienced (11:1) and it is what many others within Israel had also experienced and will experience (Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). And it is what the nation as an entire entity will also someday experience (11:26).

- What we should also see with this term is amazing, astounding, overwhelming, perplexing grace. Despite Israel's rejection of her God, God is still being kind, merciful, and gracious to save some.
 - ✓ There has been a significant transformation in what is accepted protocol in sending out wedding invitations: formal wedding invitations, "save the date" notices, emailed invitations, and E-vite signups are all pretty well accepted. The latest fad may never be acceptable though: it's the "You're NOT Invited" alerts. Apparently, some couples that have limited space, in an attempt to be clear about invitations are sending notices to make clear who *isn't* invited to come to the big day — and some are even doing the "un-invites" on social media (like Facebook). One couple sent this notice: "We've had to be pretty brutal in chopping down our guest list. I'm so sad that you won't be there with us on the day, but we look forward to catching up afterwards!" Yeah. Maybe not...
 - ✓ It might be have been expected that God would "un-invite" Israel and all her people to be His, given their rejection of Him. But He didn't. Not only will He ultimately save the entire nation, but in the interim, He is graciously saving individual Israelites to Himself. That's grace.
 - ✓ There is one more significant explanation of what happened to Israel, and the explanation takes up the rest of this section...

3. What Happened? God's HARDENING (vv. 7c-10)

• The Reality STATED (v. 7c)

- ✓ When Paul says *the rest were hardened*, he means us to understand that there was an outside force that was working to harden them, and the "force" clearly refers to God. God hardened them.
- ✓ God was actively involved in the hardening of the Israelites. It is not simply that they were "not chosen" (it's true that they weren't), but it is more than that. It is that God has confirmed them in their sin so that they (at some point) can no longer respond to His gracious offer of salvation.
- ✓ Notice that Paul is not here speaking about the nation (as a nation and the recipient of God's covenant), but he is speaking about individuals within the nation. In vv. 11-32, he will resume talking about the nation, but in vv. 7b-10, he is speaking about *individuals* within the nation.
- ✓ The big question is, "on what basis does God harden these individuals?"
 - We've already seen this principle in this book in (9:17-18, Pharaoh). The principle is that God is the author of both mercy and hardening — *and* God is *actively* involved in both mercy and hardening. He has a plan for both, and He does both.
 - When people are hardened to God and to the gospel it is because of God's direct involvement.
 - **Pharaoh** gives us a clear example of this:
 - ... Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35).
 - ... But we are also told that God hardened Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27).

- ... And notice that Ex. 4:21 precedes any of Pharaoh's personal hardening. God is author of Pharaoh's hard heart. How can this be?
- ... There is an element of this that is a mystery — how is God sovereign and yet man is responsible for his actions? (I.e., How can God harden someone in his sin, and at the same time God can justly hold that person accountable for his sin?) We can't comprehend it fully.
- ... Paul has already given us a hint, though, at how this works: cf. **Rom. 1:24, 26, 28** — men have rebelled against God, and God in His judgment have turned them over to their sin. In essence, "If you want your sin, then I condemn you (harden you) in your sin and to your sin."
- ... "God's hardening permanently binds people in the sin they have chosen for themselves." [Moo]
- ... It is important to see that Pharaoh was not neutral to God. He was born (like all men), opposed to God and he never wanted God. God did not choose Pharaoh for salvation and God kept him in his rebellion and sin, which is exactly what Pharaoh wanted. And the resulting judgment was entirely what Pharaoh deserved. God is completely just.
- What was true of Pharaoh is true of all men — God is sovereign in His elective purposes of all men: No one is hardened against his will. Everyone who is hardened gets exactly what he wants. And some who are haters and rebellious against God get mercy. Whether God is merciful in electing, or wrathful in not-electing, God is righteous and faithful.
- ✓ So God chooses and God hardens. Are there examples of that hardening? Yes there are...

- **The Reality EXEMPLIFIED (vv. 8-10)** — Paul offers three examples from the OT

- ✓ When Paul says, ***Just as it is written*** (v. 8), he means that what he has said is in accord with what has already been revealed by God in Scripture. This is not his idea; it's God's revelation.
- ✓ The quotation in **v. 8** is a combination of two passages — **Dt. 29:4** and **Is. 29:10**.
 - In Dt. 28-30, Israel is about to enter the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and Moses leads them through a recitation of blessings and cursings for their obedience or disobedience in their new land (note **29:1**). And Moses says in v. 4, that all the things they have experienced in Egypt and their wanderings, God did not allow them to understand (**29:4**). They have been blinded by God from comprehending (no "aha!" moment).
 - Then Paul adds to the quotation from Dt. 29 a quotation from **Isaiah 29:10** — God has given them a ***spirit of stupor*** — because of the sins of the leaders (**28:7**) they and the nation were made spiritually insensitive; they are beyond "sleepy" (one translation), but are apathetic and numb to the truth of God. And God has caused it.
 - Both these passages sound familiar to **Isaiah 6:9-10** (which is quoted in the NT at least 3x — **Mt. 13:14**; **Jn. 12:30**; Acts 28:26). Because of rebellion, God made it impossible for them to believe.
 - Notice that was true not only in Moses' and Isaiah's day, but ***down to this very day***. Still true.
 - God did not intend for them to know the truth; He withheld it from them, *hardening* them.

- ✓ The quotation in vv. 9-10 is from Ps. 69:22-23:
 - [Aside: the first quotation was from Deuteronomy — the Law; the second from Isaiah — the Prophets; this one is from Psalms — the Writings; with these 3 quotations, Paul is affirming that this principle is taught in all three major groups of the OT, as if to say, “the whole OT says this.”]
 - In Psalm 69, David has been suffering from persecutors, and David asks for God’s protection and salvation (e.g., 69:1ff, 14, 29). But he is also making in imprecation against his enemies (he’s asking for their judgment and destruction).
 - ... Notice that he asks for them to be ensnared, trapped, a stumbling block, and a retribution.
 - ... What David asks would happen to his persecutors, Paul says *has* happened to those Israelites who rejected God’s righteousness and Christ. This was no empty threat; not only was David freed, but the condemnation of his persecutors became a foreshadowing of the condemnation of others who would persecute the ultimate Davidic King, Jesus.
 - ... The **table** where they should have received food and blessing, became their judgment.
 - ... The truth they should have seen, they were **blinded** from understanding.
 - ... Instead of enjoying freedom, they were **bent over** in discipline and judgment (v. 10).
 - The darkening of Israel’s understanding was not accidental. It was God’s judgment on rebellion.
 - “Israel thought they saw it all; now they see nothing. Israel thought they could do it all; now they can do nothing. Israel thought they could hear it all; now they can hear nothing.” [Boa]
 - The terror of the judgment that these individuals face is **forever**. Their judgment is unrelenting.
- ✓ God does harden people in their sin and the end of that hardening is eternally tragic.

• The Reality Made HOPEFUL (vv. 11ff)

- ✓ I can’t end here without giving a hope of encouragement that we will see next week.
- ✓ This partial hardening of the nation and this complete hardening of sinful individuals and this gift of grace to some individuals was for the purpose of bringing Gentiles into the plan of salvation (11ff).
- ✓ This is part of God’s mysterious, sovereign plan — He uses sin to accomplish His purposes (v. 25).
- ✓ Yes, the fulfillment of the promises to Israel was delayed and some individual Israelites were hardened, but all that was so that the blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3) would be fulfilled.
- ✓ If you are a Gentile and you have been saved (which is most of us), give thanks for this grace!

4. What Happened? Lessons LEARNED

• Man is responsible for his sin

- ✓ It is (and always has been) tempting to minimize sin. God doesn’t.
- ✓ And even though God hardens people in their sin, that hardening is simply turning them over to what they want. They rebel so persistently against Him, He gives them that desire.

- ✓ Don't think that it is possible to escape the consequences of sin. There *are* consequences and they are terrible (3:23). God is infinitely and eternally opposed to every sin, and He will hold men accountable for every one of their sins (3:20).
- ✓ [For the believer, we are no longer under judgment because God has held the accountability for our sins against Christ and Christ overwhelmed and defeated our sins with His righteousness (12:19). The vengeance God has against our sin has been paid by Christ and the debt is satisfied.]

- **God does and will harden individual sinners (there is a time and limitation for repentance)**

- ✓ Grace is always available to sinners. People have until the moment of death to repent and some people do repent at the last moment (Lk. 23:42-43). That should make us *very* hopeful.
- ✓ But it is also true that the longer one sins, the more he is inclined to sin. The more willful his sin, the less inclined he will be to confess his sin, because the more rebellious he is. The more rebellious he is, the closer he is moving to God hardening him and saying, "It that's what you want, then you not only *may* have it, but you *must* have it and you will stay in it."
- ✓ Oh friend, if you are "dabbling" with sin, understand that there is no "dabbling" with sin. You cannot dabble with sin any more than you can be slightly pregnant or kind of in a war. If you are intentionally engaging in sin, you are moving away from God and towards hardness. I can do nothing better than to urge you to repent; RUN from your sin and RUN to Christ, who will free you from your sin. He will forgive you of your sin and He will enable you to live apart from your sin. But you *must* go to Him and you must give up the willful pursuit of your sin.
- ✓ Hear the warning of this passage: if you are sinning, you can always repent. But if you are sinning willfully, you may not always want to repent. You are not and you will not be unaffected by your perpetual sin. Now is the day to repent. Turn to Christ in faith today.

- **God is overwhelmingly gracious and persistently faithful**

- ✓ Notice all the references to grace in these verses:
 - God has not rejected His people (v. 1)
 - Paul has been saved (v. 1)
 - God has not rejected His people (He *chose* them, v. 2)
 - He has protected and preserved a remnant of His people (v. 4)
 - There has been and there still is a remnant of His people (v. 5)
 - He chooses His people by grace (v. 5) and He preserves them by grace (v. 6)
 - Even when His nation rejected Him, He still graciously chose and preserved some (v. 7)
 - The sin of national Israel was not a permanent sin (v. 11)
- ✓ Our God is a faithful God and He is a gracious God. Don't despair. Give thanks. And appeal to grace.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36