

During world war II, approximately 2/3, of the 9 Million Jews who lived in Europe, were executed by the Nazis. ... That's 6 Million people. Men, women, children¹. In the beginning, they'd machine-gun them and push them into pits. But the renowned German efficiency, devised a much more efficient process.

*They were transported by rail to death camps, where they were stripped of **all** their possessions, gassed, the gold was pulled from their teeth, and then they were cremated in giant furnaces (especially built for the task).*

It's what the Nazis termed the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question". We know it as "The Holocaust".

*And as a Christian, it would be very easy to shake my head in disbelief, and ask "How could that have ever happened?" – in Germany, where they identified as being "Christian"; And yet, the mostly Lutheran population, **hated** the Jews...*

Anti-Semitism – that's what it's called. And it didn't end with the end of WWII. And anti-Semitism wasn't put to death at the Nuremberg Trials. It continues today.

And even Martin Luther, himself – one of the heroes of the reformation – a man who, in this very book of Romans, discovered "grace" and "faith" – even he, was filled with anti-Semitism... In 1543, Luther published a 65000 word article entitled: "On the Jews and Their Lies". And others of his works and sermons, were filled with venom and hatred against the Jews...

In one of his final sermons, he called for the authorities to expel the Jews from their lands, if they would not convert to Christianity.

And so it wasn't such a large leap then, for a nation who held Luther as their spiritual hero, to feel somewhat justified, in exterminating the Jews...

*They felt they **had** the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” – get rid of them.*

And there **was** a Jewish question. In the Christian church, there has always **been** a Jewish question: And Paul asks it, right here in chapter 11:1 **I ask, then, has God rejected his people?...**

You see, Jesus **came** to the Jews. But most of the Jews, **rejected** Him. And they crucified Him. And then they persecuted His Disciples.

Consider Saul: a young, zealous, Jewish man, on the road to Damascus, for exactly that purpose – to hunt down and arrest Christians, and possibly to oversee their death, as he had done when Stephen was stoned... But on that road to Damascus, Saul was blinded by a bright light, and he met Jesus. And he became a Christian himself.

And this Saul of Tarsus, became a preacher to the Jews, but not for long, because **now** they wanted to kill **him** (he was getting a taste of his own medicine). And so he took on the Greek version of his name “Paul”, and he became a preacher to the Gentiles...

And now this Paul, a Jewish Christian; a preacher to the gentiles, is asking the question “**has God rejected his people?**” They’ve rejected Jesus Christ, but has God now rejected them? And his answer is an unequivocal “No”. **By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.**

² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

There is “a remnant”.... Things are not always as they appear.

Back in the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah, had won a tremendous victory. He challenged the prophets of Baal. Do you know the story? The prophets of Baal built an altar, and prepared their sacrifice, and from morning until noon, they called out to Baal, and danced around, and cut themselves, and Elijah’s there mocking them, “Maybe you need to call out a bit louder. Maybe he’s busy; or maybe he’s thinking; or maybe he’s in the toilet....” And of course, nothing happened.

But then Elijah calls the people together, and they make a simple altar out of 12 stones (representing the sons of Jacob – the tribes of Israel) and then they flood it with water. And then he prays to God, and fire falls from heaven, and consumes the offering, and the wood, and the water, and the dust, and the stones...

God had proved his presence and His power and His sovereignty and His superiority. And Baal had utterly failed.

And then at Elijah's word, they seized the prophets of Baal, and killed them all.

But when the wicked Queen Jezebel heard about all this, instead of giving glory to God, she became even **more** determined to hunt down Elijah and have him killed. And even though Elijah had just experienced this tremendous victory, and he should've been on top of the world, he fled to the desert. And there he is, moping around in the desert – a picture of depression. And the way he sees it, "I'm the only prophet left – there is no one else." And he was suicidal – he just wanted to die...

But God said to him, "You're not the only one left." Elijah felt he was the only one. But things are not always as they appear. God had kept for Himself a remnant. There were 7000 men who had not bowed their knee to Baal.

And just like that, things aren't as they appear now.

Yeah, the Jews **have** largely rejected Jesus. To us, it's pretty much a novelty, to meet a Jew who is a Christian. They often call themselves a messianic Jew. And as far as I know, I only know 1 or 2 of them – Probably because of where we live – we don't have a large Jewish population here.

And it's not only the Jews – it's the **whole** of Israel. The Jews of Jesus day, were really only 2 of the 12 tribes (Judah and Benjamin). But here, Paul's not only talking about the Jews – he's talking about Israel. God's covenant was with Israel.

And it might seem now, that God has given up on Israel, but He hasn't. A “**partial hardening**” has come upon Israel, for a time. And so the Gospel has been preached to the Gentiles instead (that's us).

V²⁸ **As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake.**

Alright, this might be hard to understand, but:

- Israel's hearts were hardened, so that they would reject the Gospel.
- The Gospel would then be preached to the Gentiles
- The Gentiles are saved in Christ.
- Israel get jealous of this – they realise what they've been missing
- And it seems to indicate, that near the time of the return of Jesus, we're going to see much of Israel, receiving their messiah, and being saved.

Now, that might seem like a strange way to go about it. Why would God harden the hearts of His chosen covenant people, so that the rest of the world could get a look-in? I'll tell you why: So that we all stand before Him, on an equal footing. We've **all** been disobedient, and so therefore the only way **any** of us can be saved, is by His mercy.

- He's shown mercy to the Gentiles
- He's shown mercy to a **few** Jews (to those few who **have** turned to Jesus...)
- **And** there will be a great **outpouring** of His mercy, at the time when Israel will largely turn back to Jesus.

God hasn't given up on Israel. He made a covenant with their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made a covenant with David. And the Lord will keep His covenant. **V²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

So, why's Paul telling us all of this now? What's the point of it? ... Well, we have to remember, that as we read the book of Romans, we're actually reading someone else's mail. It's a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

And if you can remember back to the very first message I gave, in the introduction to Romans, the church in Rome, almost certainly began, as Jewish Christians, returned home, from the harvest festival of Pentecost ...

So, the Roman Church had **Jewish** roots. But in the year 49A.D., all Jews were expelled from Rome... As we studied the book of Acts, we came across Priscilla and Aquila, who Paul met up with in Corinth. And this husband and wife, were Jewish Christians, had been expelled from Rome.

But around about the year **54A.D.**, they were allowed to come back to Rome again. And in fact, Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila, in this very letter...

Alright, so the church had a very changing character: It began with Jewish roots, and so (almost certainly), the leadership were Jewish... But then the Jews were run out of town, and so the leadership had to be taken on by the Gentile Christians... But then the Jews were allowed to come back to Rome again... Now, can you imagine, the upheaval that church would've gone through???

And the Jews continued to persecute Christians. The Romans blamed just about everything on the Jews. The Jews blamed the Christians. And these national antagonisms and animosities, very easily spilled over into the church.

And as the church became more and more Gentile, and less and less Jewish, the Gentiles started to get a bit arrogant about it all. And even today, many people have the belief that the Church has replaced Israel. But it didn't. The Church grew out of Israel. In a sense, it is the fulfilment of Israel. And in God's grace, Gentile Christians, have been included in the church.

And so to the Gentiles, Paul says, “**Don't be arrogant.**”

And here's the image he uses to explain it:

The olive tree, is an image for Israel. But some of the branches were broken off. Alright, the unbelieving Jews – those who rejected Christ. And Paul likens the **Gentiles** who have been saved, to a shoot taken from a wild olive tree (alright, it's not a domesticated cultivar – it doesn't belong in the garden)... But God takes that shoot of the gentiles, and grafted in to the rootstock of Israel. Gentile Christians draw their nourishment from the rootstock.

Now of course, we know the rootstock is Jesus Christ. When we get to Chapter 15, we'll hear Jesus described as “**the root of Jesse**”. But we have to understand that the church does **not** replace Israel – it is included into the promise made **to** Israel.

Douglass Moo says:

We thereby capture the necessary note of continuity — the church is the continuation of Israel into the new age. And discontinuity — the church, not Israel, is now the locus of God's work in the world...ⁱⁱ

So there's no room for arrogance against Israel. **We** Gentiles are the new-comers. We are included with them, in this new thing that God is doing.

And Paul sounds a very clear warning, that we need to hear. This whole section acts as a warning to believers, “to continue in the faith”.

If I was to ask you, “Is God kind? or Is He severe?”, What would you say?

- Put your hand up if you believe God is kind.
- Righto, now put up your hand if you believe God is severe.

Did some of you put up your hand twice?

Well that's good, because that's the correct answer.

V²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

God is kind. We know that – He sent Jesus Christ to die for us. But He's also severe. He is uncompromising. Only believers – only those who are faithful, will be saved. It was true for Israel, and it's true for Gentiles too.

This came up a few weeks ago – 'Once saved, always saved'...

Some people believe that, once you've made a commitment to Jesus, you can never fall away. They say that even if you don't want to be a disciple of Jesus any more – tough – God's got you and he won't let you go...

Well, that may be one of the '5 points of Calvinism', but that doesn't make it biblical, and it certainly doesn't make it true. Far from it, in fact... If God is severe to the Jews who have forsaken the covenant, **why** would we believe **we** could ever escape His severity if we lose faith and stop following Him.

Paul tells us that we stand fast through faith. The only way Israel will be saved, is if they come to faith... And for **us**, to live in Christ, **we** must remain grafted into the rootstock. If we don't continue in the faith, we will be cut off.

God's ultimate aim – for us, **and** for Israel – is to show us mercy. And while we remain grafted into that rootstock, He will continue to nourish us with His goodness.

So, let's continue on in the faith.

Today I want to finish in the same way that Paul did – by praising God.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?"

³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust

ⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.