

Romans 10:14-11:12

Introduction

In the previous section, the Nationalistic Jewish Teacher (NJT) was irritated over the notion that Gentiles who did not even care about being covenant partners with God had it dropped in their lap and Jews who had sought it for centuries did not find it. Paul's reply was that they ran after the wrong thing. Jews (those who rejected Jesus) were still trying to find covenant relationship with God based on doing the deeds of Torah. The reason Gentiles experienced the blessings of righteousness was because they embraced the faithfulness of God as seen in the Christ event.

Paul wanted the NJT to understand it was not up to Jews to find covenant relationship with God. They did not have to go up to heaven or travel down into the abyss to find it. God had dropped Jesus Messiah right in front of their eyes and they failed to see. Jews could still experience the blessings if they only called on the faithfulness of God, as had the Gentiles who embraced Jesus. The covenant blessings are for everyone who calls on the Lord including Jew and Greek.

In the following text, the NJT will challenge Paul with the defense that Jews have not adequately had an opportunity to call on Jesus. Paul will show that they have had opportunity and what was happening among Jews who had rejected Jesus was even found in the NJT's own scriptures. As stated before, what was currently happening in most of Israel is not the last word in the story.

Israel's Failure: 10:14-21

In order to understand the flow of thought, it is again important to understand that the conversation between Paul and the NJT continues in this text. There is some dispute as to when we should see Paul speaking or the NJT speaking.

The NJT asked a series of questions beginning in verse 14. He was responding to Paul's statement "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." There has got to be a reason most Jews have rejected Jesus. They cannot call on Jesus, as you (Paul) have stated, unless they trust in Jesus and they cannot do that unless they have heard your (Paul's) gospel (your reading of Torah) and they cannot do that unless preachers are sent out. The reason most Jews have to this point rejected Jesus is surely because they have not heard the gospel. Therefore, they cannot be held accountable for their rejection of Jesus.

Scholars who see the diatribe style here differ as to whether 15b is a response from Paul or a continuation of the NJT's argument. The NJT may be using Isa. 52:7 to support his position that preachers have to be sent out. If it is Paul, he was making the point that the messengers have gone out.

If 15b is Paul, the NJT is portrayed in 16a as responding with a complaint that even though messengers have gone out most Jews have not obeyed their message, which should be troubling to Paul's position. The word "obeyed" can mean obey but has as its primary meaning to hear or to listen. Dunn in his comments on 1:5 gives the meaning of "give ear to, answer,

heed.”¹ He goes on to translate 1:5 as either “response which is faith” or “obedience which stems from faith.” A response of obedience to what is heard is not “works.” It merits nothing. The difference between accepting Gentiles and rejecting Jews is that the Gentiles, after hearing the gospel, responded with a life that confessed their trust in Jesus as the resurrected Lord. This is fundamental to Paul’s view of the Christian’s life. Trust naturally leads to action, but it is not a meritorious action in which one can boast. To boast in one’s life, rather than in the faithfulness of God diminishes the glory of God.

Then there is a question as to whether 16b is Paul or the NJT. The introduction of 16b can read either “for” or “indeed.” If it is Paul, Isa. 53:1 supports what was happening. The message had indeed gone out and many Jews had not trusted it just as they had rejected the word of God through Isaiah and as Isaiah had predicted it, would be in the days of Messiah. Paul then continued with the common Jewish thought of his day regarding Isa. 52-53 (v. 17). Isaiah’s message was about Messiah just as Paul’s gospel proclaimed. Those Jews who were rejecting Paul’s gospel were rejecting the very one Isa. 53 pointed to. Torah called for faith in Messiah. This is what Jews who rejected Jesus failed to see.

The NJT responded (v. 18) with the objection they (Israel) have not heard. This very well may be a declaration, “But I say, they have not heard!” instead of reading it as a question. Paul responded with, “On the contrary, their voice has gone out into all the earth (Psa. 19:4).” This may be intended to be a reverence to Gen. 12:3, “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The message concerning Jesus Messiah had been going out from Jerusalem for 20 years since the Day of Pentecost.

The NJT (v. 19) objected with the obvious statement that Israel had not understood or acknowledged. Paul countered with a quote from Moses and two quotations from Isaiah. Deut. 32:21 is in a context of Israel’s idolatrous rebellion. God would provoke disloyal Israel to jealousy through a “no people” and a “foolish nation,” which Jews had identified as nations such as the Egypt, Philistia, and Babylon. Paul saw it as a prophecy that God would reach out to Gentiles with the message of Jesus Messiah. God’s way of dealing with Israel’s rejection was to use Gentiles who embraced Messiah to arouse jealousy in Israel so they might come to understand and trust in God’s righteousness found in Jesus. It might be interesting to note that the word “jealous” is of the same root as the word “zeal” in 10:2. Israel’s zeal would turn into jealousy. How should the NJT have recognized the word had been preached and understood? Jews who had rejected Jesus were jealous about the work God was doing with Gentiles. This is exactly what Moses had said.

This conversation is a reversal of what the NJT said of Gentiles in 1:18ff. He charged Gentiles with having dishonored God even though God had revealed Himself to them to the point they should have understood. Now it was Jews, to whom God had revealed Himself through the message about Jesus, who were dishonoring God.

Isaiah 65:1 originally spoke of God reaching out to a disloyal Israel but was used by Paul (10:20a) of God’s revealing Himself to and being found by Gentiles. God had shown or revealed Himself to Israel in the past and was now revealing Himself to Gentiles. This is one of the

¹ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988) pg. 17.

previous objections of the NJT (9:30). Gentiles who were not even pursuing covenant relationship found it. That Gentiles would turn to God in the end time was an established view of Judaism. The difference between the NJT and Paul is that the NJT believed Gentiles had to become Jews while Paul's gospel said they did not.

The next quote (10:20b) is from Isa. 65:2. God was also reaching out to Jews. The problem was that many Jews were "disobedient and contrary" in contrast to some Gentiles who found God. All three quotes have the first-person "I." It is all God's initiative to reach out to both Jew and Gentile. Paul refused to take Israel off the hook for their rejection of Jesus Messiah. They were responsible for being disobedient to the voice of God.

Israel's Full Inclusion: 11:1-12

The NJT's response (11:1) "has God rejected his people" was indicative of his view of Paul's gospel, a charge that Paul adamantly rejected. The current situation of most of Israel rejecting Jesus is not an indication of God having cast Israel aside. Paul himself was proof that the charge was false. Being "his (God's) people whom he had foreknown" (10:2a) was the way Jews spoke of themselves to the exclusion of other nations. For comments on this refer to the discussion of 8:29. Israel is God's elect people and nothing has changed that. Paul may have made a point that he was of the tribe of Benjamin to bolster his claim of loyalty to God. The tribe of Benjamin was the only tribe who stayed with Judah and continued to worship in Jerusalem when the other tribes formed their own alliance.

Paul then turned to the days of Elijah for an explanation of what was happening with most of Israel. After the contest between Yahweh and Baal in 1 Kings 18 Elijah feared for his life and fled to the wilderness where God came to him. In 1 Kings 19:10 Elijah replied to God with the complaint that there were so few faithful in Israel. Elijah received a "divine reply" or "oracle" to his complaint (v. 4). This word translated "divine reply" is found only here in the NT. It is also found in 2 Maccabees 2:4 which tells of God giving an oracle to Jeremiah to take the tent of meeting and the ark to a hiding place at Mt. Sinai (Horeb). Elijah was at Sinai when God spoke the words quoted in 11:4. Dunn states the possibility that this word may have been a catchword reminding Israel of the giving of the covenant and Torah and of God's self-proclamation of being a God who is merciful.² Dunn also makes the point that the word translated "kept" can carry the meaning of, "left over, seen to it that something was left (for the future)." This certainly could have been Paul's purpose for using this word. There is a remnant God has "left over" for His future purposes.

Remnant theology is very important in this text. The number 7,000 may play a role in understanding remnant theology. If 7,000 represents completeness, it opens the door to two possible conclusions. One, the remnant is the completeness of Israel found in the faithful remnant, or two, the remnant represent the promise of literally all of Israel experiencing the blessings of reconciliation in the future? The idea of remnant became very important during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (Isa. 37:4, 32; Jer. 6:9; 15:9; 23:3; 24:8). Paul may have seen a typology between the two times that were points of crisis for Israel as was his own day.

² Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988) pg. 637.

Another interesting note is that the words translated “kept” or “left over” in verse 4 and “remnant” in verse 5 are from the same root word thus closely connecting the “left over” with the “remnant.” This would be seen in Greek but missed in our English translations. Dunn quotes a translation by Barrett, “there has come into being such a remnant”³ (as was spoken of in Elijah’s day).

The phrase “the present time” also has significance. If it is to be connected to the “now” of 3:21, it has eschatological (end times) implications. What was happening in Paul’s day was not an unexpected turn of events. Rather, it was a part of God’s purpose all along that would play a role in bringing about the climax of God’s redemption and reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, and was foreshadowed in the Elijah event.

In verses 5 and 6 the word “grace” is used four times. The remnant’s relationship with God, just as God’s choice of Israel from the beginning, was based upon God’s gracious election. It was God’s elective grace that made the relationship possible. So, although the “present time” remnant embraced Jesus Messiah, their trust did not put God under obligation to bless them. It was still God’s gracious choice that allowed their trust to have any meaning. What then is Paul trying to say here? Perhaps simply that we give up trying to rely upon ourselves to somehow obligate God to us, and we acquiesce to God’s loving pursuit and accept his gracious mercy.

The NJT’s “what then” probably refers to those Jews who were still rejecting Jesus. For an expansion on Paul’s initial response (“Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking”) see the comments on 9:31-31. Those who embraced Jesus obtained covenant relationship and those currently rejecting Jesus were hardened. There is a link here between what God did with Pharaoh and what God was doing with some in Israel. God was working with Israel just as he had with Pharaoh to bring about His intended purpose. This is the same idea of the stumbling stone in 9:33 that will be discussed again in 11:9,11. The quote in verse 8 is a combination of Deut. 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. It was by divine initiative and intention (“God gave them”) that some in Israel were hardened, were given a sluggish spirit, had eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear.

Although it has been seen before in Romans, the rest of chapter 11 will challenge our understanding of the sovereignty of God and how He works in the world to fulfill His promises to all humanity. Paul had no problem with identifying God as the one who threw the stumbling stone in Israel’s path or as the one who hardened many in Israel. It needs to be remembered this is God working out His purposes. God can and does harden some for a while and other the eyes of others. Both of which are part of fulfilling his purposes. We, as His creation do not have to understand why or how He does what He does. It is shortsighted to think we can. So, we put out trust in the one who is beyond our understanding knowing He is doing what is best for the creation He deeply loves.

Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 69:22-23. The word translated “table” probably refers to the table fellowship. Table fellowship was another part of Jewish understanding of ritual purity that resulted in a misguided understanding of Torah. Many in Israel would not even eat with

³ Ibid. pg. 639.

other Jews, much less Gentiles, who they thought were not as kosher as they ought to have been. Table fellowship became a place of separation. This is the reason Jesus was attacked for eating with publicans and sinners. These groups were Jews that were considered by some not to be holy enough to eat with. God turned the things in which Israel had put their trust into their snare and trap. These words are used to speak of both divine judgment (Ezek. 12:13; 17:20) and of a trap made for oneself (Psa. 9:15; 57:6). This text was originally used as a curse on Israel's enemies but was used by Paul against Israel. Many in Israel were in the same position in which they had always viewed Gentiles, cursed.

The NJT comes back with "have they stumbled so as to fall." This question is not about some temporary stumbling. The NJT is wondering if Israel had fallen with no hope of ever gaining what they had pursued. It may be that the NJT felt himself moving toward Paul's position and was struggling with where that was leading. Paul's response was again emphatically, "No!" There are at least two understandings for "through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles." It could refer to the rejection of Jesus that resulted in his crucifixion and the defeat of Sin and death for the world. It might also refer to the rejection Paul and others received upon presenting the gospel in synagogues that resulted in their shaking the dust off their feet and going to the Gentiles. Regardless of whether either of these possibilities are Paul's intent, the result is that the blessings of covenant relationship (riches) promised to Abraham was made possible by Israel's hardening and stumbling.

Verse 12 ends with "their (Israel's) fullness." This is in contrast to their stumbling and defeat stated earlier, and is parallel to the fullness of Gentiles in 11:25. Israel's fullness is probably speaking of at least an expansion in the number in Israel who would come to call of Jesus. Paul certainly believed what was currently true of Israel in his day was not the final story for Israel. God's purpose did not end with the hardening and stumbling of Israel and the riches of God being experienced by Gentiles. God's purpose included Israel becoming jealous as a result of Gentiles receiving God's riches. Israel's jealousy would in some way lead to their understanding their misstep in rejecting Jesus and lead them to call on Jesus Messiah. In this scenario is a reversal of roles. Earlier, it was Jews first and then Gentiles. Now it is Gentiles first and then Jews.

There is a question among scholars about the scope of this conversion among Jews. This difference will be acknowledged through the rest of the discussion of chapter 11. Some scholars believe this "fullness" of Israel includes every physical descendent of Abraham. Others believe there will be a large conversion in the future that would not include all physical descendents of Israel. From this perspective there will continue to be some of Israel who will never embrace Jesus Messiah. More will be said on this as the study continues. The same thing would be true of the "fullness" of Gentiles in 11:25.

It might be worth stating again that this future fullness is not the church that takes the place of Israel, the physical descendent of Abraham. Throughout chapters 9-11 there is a distinction between ethnic Jews and Gentiles. That distinction can be seen clearly in 11:24-25 where there is a temporary hardening of Israel until the "full number of Gentiles has come in," which will lead to more (or all) of Israel being grafted back into the tree."

Regardless of which understanding was meant by Paul, Israel would again fulfill its purpose as intended from their initial calling by God. Their coming to accept Jesus Messiah would bring additional blessings to the Gentiles ["how much more will their full inclusion mean"]

(to Gentiles)]. As Abraham was told, “And in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3).”

Conclusion

As will be seen in 11:14, the primary audience of the letter is Gentiles who have accepted Jesus but are mostly likely wavering in their understanding of covenant membership with God. Jews who had rejected Paul’s gospel are heavily influencing Gentile believers. As Paul constructed this diatribe with the NJT, his purpose is to keep Gentile Christians from being swayed by Jews with the position of the NJT. It is through calling on Jesus, not through the deeds of Torah, that covenant blessings are experienced. Calling on Jesus comes from an understanding that any other path to relationship with God is futile.

The gospel has gone out. Jews did understand the gospel as evidenced by their jealousy from seeing God working among the Gentiles. God had spoken through Moses that a day would come when God would make rebellious Israel jealous through a foolish nation (as Gentiles would have been viewed by Jews). That jealousy would come through the foolish nation finding the God they had not even pursued.

That many in Israel had rejected Jesus in Paul’s day was not evidence that God had rejected Israel anymore than the same behavior in Elijah’s days gave evidence of God’s rejection. As in the days of Elijah, God had preserved a remnant to bring about His purposes. The existence of a remnant was made possible by God’s gracious election and not by their ability to practice the deeds of Torah.

In this text, Paul places the primary responsibility for the hardening that resulted in Israel’s rejection of Messiah in God’s lap. Whatever we may think or make of that, God was at work using Israel’s focus on Jewish identity markers to bring about their stumbling so that Gentiles could experience the riches of God. This in turn is designed to create jealousy in Israel leading them to call on Jesus, which in turn would in some way bring even more riches to the Gentiles. As will be stated at the end of chapter 11, God’s ways are mysterious and beyond our understanding. Regardless of how much disequilibrium we may experience as a result of God’s ways, our peace comes in knowing God deeply loves His creation and is working for its best interest.

