

Introduction

Paul starts our passage today by asking the question if God has rejected His people. The Greek word used for rejected is *apotheo* (Strong's G683), which means to be thrust out or pushed away. The idea of being rejected by God or anyone else is not a nice thought. Psychologist Guy Winch said, "*Rejections are the most common emotional wound we sustain in daily life.*"¹ There have been a number of times in my life that I have been rejected. I was a tremendous athlete growing up. It did not matter if it was golf, tennis, squash, baseball, ping pong, or riding a unicycle, I was a great athlete. My freshman year of high school, I tried out for the freshman basketball team. They had a three-day tryout and during the tryouts, we had to demonstrate our basketball skills. Most of the boys trying out had played in basketball leagues from the time they were five years old, and they could dribble, pass, shoot, boxout, and defend. On the other hand, I had never played before. I did not know the rules of the game, much less how to dribble, shoot or defend. To top it off when I was in ninth grade, I was five-foot tall and weighed ninety-six pounds. I had not started my teenage growth spurt. So, at the end of the tryouts I was given the devastating news that I had been rejected. I had never felt this kind of rejection before, particularly in athletics. I did not feel like I had been given a chance to learn and develop. From the coaches' perspective, he was looking for those who had already developed a certain level of proficiency, and he was limited in the number of people that could be on the team. But, from my perspective, I felt rejected.

The week after Thanksgiving this year I was notified that the company I have been working for was terminating my employment. This was the company that my mother and father had started, and it had our name on it. This was a company that I had poured my life into for seventeen years, working countless overtime hours. This was a company that I had led and grown. Now, they were thrusting me out and pushing me away. I was shocked, and deeply saddened by the rejection. As a young teenager, I did not know Christ when I was rejected by the basketball coach. As a mature believer, I do know Christ, and I have held on to His promises. I believe that God does work all things together for good in the lives of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. I believe that God prepares good works in advance for us to walk in. I believe that the steps of the righteous are ordered by God. I believe that God watches over me and protects me from all evil. I believe that God will accomplish all that concerns me. I have been clinging to these promises, and yet I have still had sadness of heart over the rejection.

In our text today, we will be looking at Israel's rejection. This is not a personal rejection that I experienced; this is a rejection of God by the nation of Israel. First, we will see that it was not God that had rejected His people; God had stretched out His hand all day long. Second, we will see that it was Jews that had rejected God. Third, we will see that Israel's rejection brought consequences. There was a partial hardening of Israel, which led to an opportunity for the Gentiles to be grafted in. God's desire is that Israel will be made jealous by seeing the Gentiles walking in the promises that were originally given to them. At some point, Israel will repent and receive the Messiah and walk in the new covenant.

Israel's Rejection

1. God had not rejected Israel
2. Israel had rejected God
3. The Consequences of Rejection

¹ <https://ideas.ted.com/why-rejection-hurts-so-much-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

(Rom 11:1-16) "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. {2} God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? {3} "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." {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." {5} In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. {6} But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. {7} What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; {8} just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." {9} And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. {10} "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER." {11} I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. {12} Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! {13} But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, {14} if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. {15} For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead? {16} If the first piece of *dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too."

1. God had not rejected Israel (Rom 11:1)

Paul's first point is that God had not rejected Israel. He begins with the question, "God has not rejected His people, has He?" Then, he answered his question emphatically, "May it never be!" To get the full understanding we have to go back to Romans 10. Paul did not write in chapters; the chapter divisions were added later. The discussion on Israel's rejection began in Romans 10, and this is a continuation of that discussion. In Romans 10:21, Paul quoted from Isaiah 65:2, saying, "All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." God had stretched out His hands all day long to the Jews. God was pursuing the Jews. He was not pushing them out or thrusting them out. God had not rejected Israel; in fact, He had done just the opposite of that, by continually reaching out to them.

(Rom 11:1) "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."

(Rom 10:21) "But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE." (Isaiah 65:2)

Paul has given a Biblical reference about how God has not rejected Israel. Now, he gives a personal illustration. He wrote, "For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." If God had rejected the Jews, none of the Jews would be included in His new covenant, but God had not rejected the Jews. Paul and many other Jews had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul wrote that he was not ashamed of the gospel, for it was the power of God for salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The gospel was first preached to the house of

Israel, and the first believers were Jews. God had not rejected Israel; He had stretched out His hand all day long to them.

(Rom 1:16) "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

When Jesus, the Messiah, came, He came to the house of Israel. In Mark 7, Jesus was in Tyre and was approached by a Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, who was asking Him to cast a demon out of her daughter. Jesus gave her an answer that bothered me a long time until I understood the passage. Jesus said, "Let the children be satisfied first." He was saying that the children of Israel were to get the bread first. In Matthew's account, Jesus said to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus is the bread of life and He was sent to the Jewish people first. God had not rejected the Jews; He was stretching out His hands to them.

(Mark 7:26-28) "Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. {27} And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." {28} But she answered and *said to Him, "Yes, Lord, *but* even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."

(Matt 15:24) "But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent out the twelve apostles, instructing them, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" God was stretching out His hand to the Jews. He had in no way rejected them. Jesus went first to the house of Israel. He would stretch out His hand to the Gentiles later, but He initially came to the house of Israel.

(Matt 10:5-7) "These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; {6} but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. {7} And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Paul's third example is from 1 Kings 19:10, where Elijah pleaded with God against Israel, saying that they had killed His prophets and torn down His altars. God responded to Elijah by saying that He had kept for Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There had always been a remnant of Jews who were true followers of God. There was a remnant who believed God and were true descendants of Abraham, the father of faith. God had protected this remnant of Jews that were true worshippers of Him. The number seven in the Hebrew represents a large number; it does not mean a literal seven thousand men. It could be twenty thousand or seven thousand and three men. There were a large number of Jews that had not worshiped the pagan God, Baal, and participated in idolatrous worship. God kept for Himself these true worshippers of Him, and He protected them.

(Rom 11:2-4) "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? {3} "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."

{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."

Paul connects the dots saying, "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." God has not rejected the Jews. At the present time there is a remnant of Jews by God's gracious choice. Some people think that God chose certain Jews to be saved and chose others to be vessels of wrath. That is not what Paul means when he writes, "by God's gracious choice." Paul explains by saying, it is by grace and not by works. Abraham was justified by faith, not works. God's plan of grace was that He would make righteous those that sought Him by faith. By the works of the law, no man could ever be justified. The people of God's gracious choice are those that pursued a relationship with God by faith, not works.

(Rom 11:5-6) "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. {6} But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

In Adam Clark's notes on Romans 11:5-6, he wrote, "*And these are saved just as God has saved all believers from the beginning; they are chosen by his grace, not on account of any worth or excellence in themselves, but through his goodness are they chosen to have a place in his Church, and continue to be his people, entitled to all the privileges of the new covenant. The election of grace simply signifies God's gracious design in sending the Christian system into the world, and saving under it all those who believe in Christ Jesus, and none else. Thus the believers in Christ are chosen to inherit the blessings of the Gospel, while those who seek justification by the works of the law are rejected. And this is done according to the election of grace, or the rule of choosing any persons to be the people of God upon the footing of grace; which takes in all that believe in his Son Jesus Christ: some of the Jewish people did so believe; therefore those believing Jews are a remnant according to the election of grace. They are saved in that way in which alone God will save mankind.*"

2. Israel had rejected God (Rom 11:7-10)

God did not reject Israel; He had stretched out His hand all day long. It was Israel that rejected God. They were a disobedient and obstinate people. They disobeyed God's laws and did not listen to His voice. They were stubborn or obstinate, wanting to fulfill their own desires and will rather than seeking to fulfill God's will in their lives. Israel worshipped the pagan gods of the nations around them, rather than worshipping the true God. Even though God had stretched out His hands to them, they disobeyed and stubbornly rejected God.

(Rom 10:21) "But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

In verse seven, Paul wrote that what Israel had sought, it had not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened. Again, those that are chosen are not a select group of people that God sovereignly chose to inherit eternal life. Those that were chosen are those that had sought God by faith, not by trying to establish their own righteousness. Those that had rejected God were hardened. I believe that our hearts are always being softened or hardened. When we believe God and obey Him, our hearts are made softer. When we pray, fast, and seek God, our hearts are softened. When we repent of sin, our hearts are tenderized and softened.

When we spend time in worship, soaking worship, our hearts are softened. On the other hand, when we disobey God and stubbornly resist, our hearts are hardened. Israel had disobeyed and been obstinate, and consequently, their hearts had been hardened.

(Rom 11:7) "What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;"

Paul quotes Moses, Isaiah, and David, giving some details about this hardening. They had a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not. Their table had become a snare and a trap and a stumbling block. Their eyes were darkened to see not. To become hard of heart is not a path that we ever want to walk on. We want to be a soft-hearted people who obey God and are quick to respond to Him.

(Rom 11:8-10) "just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." {9} And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. {10} "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER." (Deut 29:4, Is 29:10, Ps 69:22-23)

I mentioned how I felt over being rejected. Think for just a minute how God felt. He had done everything He could and yet the Jews had rejected Him. I can only imagine the sadness of heart that God felt because of the rejection of Him by the Jews.

3. The Consequences of Israel's Rejection

There are always consequences for our actions. We saw that the rejection by the Jews led to a hardened heart. Paul wrote that even though they were disobedient and obstinate, they did not stumble as to fall. Even though they stumbled, they were not cut off from God's grace. God's grace and forgiveness is available for anyone that repents and places his faith in Him. They did not stumble as to fall, but their heart were hardened and they were blinded by their sins.

(Rom 11:11) "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous."

That was just one of the consequences. There were some other consequences, and not all of them are bad. Paul said that by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. God's plan was always to include the Gentiles. In Genesis 12:3, God told Abraham that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. In Genesis 18:18, when God was getting ready to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, "since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." God's covenant and blessings were always intended to include all the nations of the earth. His lineage would go through Abraham's seed, but the blessings were for all the nations. The transgression of the Jews ushered in God's plan of salvation to include the Gentiles. Paul gives one reason, which was to make the Jews jealous. However, that was not the only reason. His intention from the very beginning was to bless all nations through Abraham. The transgression of the Jews opened the door for the Gentiles.

(Gen 12:3) "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

(Gen 18:18) “since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?”

The Jews were God's chosen people, and even though they had sinned and rejected God, God's covenant and promises to Abraham were not going to be withdrawn. God is a covenant-keeping God. Paul wrote if the transgression of the Jews is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be. In other words, there will be a time in the future that the Jews will turn to God and accept Jesus, the Messiah, and this will be a spectacular occasion.

(Rom 11:12) “Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!”

Paul then addresses his Gentile audience and tells them that he is an apostle of the Gentiles. God wanted to use the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous, and since Paul's ministry was to Gentiles, he wanted to magnify his ministry so that he might move to jealousy his fellow countrymen and save some of them. God's grace and salvation was available to any Jew or Gentile that would believe God and accept Jesus as the Messiah.

(Rom 11:13-14) “But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, {14} if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.”

Paul again speaks of how spectacular the occasion will be when the Jews return to God. He said, “if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” It will be a marvelous and spectacular occasion.

(Rom 11:15) “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?”

Then, Paul wrote, “if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.” The Jews had a feast of first fruits, and they gave an offering to the Lord of the first fruits. The whole crop was considered holy because the first fruits had been given to God. The first piece of dough was Abraham, the father of faith, and because of his faith, the lump will also be holy. Paul then switched from bread to branches, and said if the root is holy, the branches are too. The root is the ancestral line of the Jews. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all devoted to God and had received God's covenant. Now, all the branches, that is everyone that is devoted to God and receives His covenant, will be holy and set apart for God.

(Rom 11:16) “If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.”

Paul's switch from bread to branches is a transition to the next section, where Paul is going to deal with grafting in branches to the rich root of the olive tree. We will cover that next week when we look at the attitude that the Gentiles are to have towards Israel.

Conclusion and Application

There are several takeaways from the passage. First, God is a covenant-keeping God. He “is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not

do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" When God gave a covenant to Abraham, He was going to keep it. Even though Israel was unfaithful, God did not reject His chosen people. He continued to stretch out His hand to them. When God told Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed by him, God kept that promise also. God, in His unsearchable wisdom, continued to reach out to the Jews by including the Gentiles in His plan of salvation, hoping that it would provoke the Jews to jealousy when they saw the Gentiles obtaining the promises that were originally given to them. God continued to stretch out His arms to them.

(Num 23:19) "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

When God speaks to people they have a choice to make. If we respond to God appropriately, we find grace, mercy, and forgiveness. When we disobey and are obstinate, our hearts are hardened. In Hebrews 3:13, we are exhorted to encourage one another so that none of us are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We need encouragement from one another so that we do not fall into sin and be hardened by it. This morning, take a minute to examine your heart. Have you been listening to the Lord? Are you spending time in His word? Are you heeding the things that He is speaking to you about? Or, are there some things that you disregarded? In Acts 3:19, we are exhorted to repent and return to God, so that our sins can be wiped away and times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Let me encourage you this morning, to humble yourself and say yes to God so that you may experience times of refreshing.

(Heb 3:13) "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

(Acts 3:19) "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;"

There may be someone listening to this message and you have never received Christ. We have a picture of God stretching out His arms to you. He is offering you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Do you believe that Jesus came and died for our sins? Do you believe that God raised Him from the dead? Are you willing to confess Jesus as Lord today? Jesus is standing at the door knocking. Are you willing to open the door of your heart and receive Him today? Let me invite you to pray with me.

"Jesus, I do believe that You came so that we can have eternal life. I believe that You died for my sins, and that you were raised from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and forgiven me of my sins. I bow before You this morning and confess You as my Lord. I look forward to being part of Your kingdom, and Your family. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

Q & A

- I mentioned some things that harden and soften hearts. Do you feel that your heart has been softened this past year? What are things that you have done that have softened your heart?
- In your own estimation, would a Jew looking at your life be jealous of what you have?
- Many teach that God's grace is irresistible. If that is the case, how can we explain Israel's rejection of God, even though He continued to stretch out His arms to them?

Introduction (Rom 11:1-16)

1. **God had not rejected Israel** (Rom 11:1-6, 10:21, Is 65:2, Rom 1:16, Mark 7:26-28, Matt 15:24, 10:5-7, 1Ki 19:10)

2. **Israel had rejected God** (Rom 11:7-10, Rom 10:21)

3. **The Consequences of Israel's Rejection** (Rom 11:11-16, Gen 12:3, 18:18)

Conclusion and Application (Num 23:19, Heb 3:13, Acts 3:19)