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The Testimony of the Jewish Believers

11: 1-10

The testimony of the Jewish believers DIG: Why does Paul need to point out that God has not rejected His people? Why do you think some people assumed this? What was Elijah's complaint to God? What was Elijah saying about God's plans? What does God's answer to Elijah reveal about his intentions for His people? How do people try to earn the grace of God? Why don't our efforts put God in our debt? Why are some people open to the Good News, while others are closed? Why can we be certain of God's grace for all who receive it?

REFLECT: What does Paul mean by "a spirit of dullness?" What hope does God offer to all people? How do you know if you are among "the elect?" What do you learn from Paul's words here about God's sovereignty and your responsibility to respond to His grace? For what things does this passage make you feel grateful? How do you think non-Messianic Jews are misled about the true way of salvation? What are some things in which non-Messianic Jews place their hope? Why is it important for you to never take your salvation for granted?

The rejection of Isra'el is not total because there is a believing remnant; this was true in the Dispensation of Torah and it is true in the Dispensation of Grace.

Paul was aware that **he** was walking on holy ground with **his** writings. The Jewish history **he** used to illustrate ADONAI's amazing plan of **grace** for the whole world was the same history **the Jewish people** used as proof of being **God's** exclusive **people**. Paul felt a great love for **his** fellow **Israelites**. **He** even wished **he** could take **their** place under the judgment of **Ha'Shem** if it would ensure **their** understanding of the Gospel. In this next section of **his** letter, **Paul** begins to highlight **God's continuing** plans for **Isra'el**, **His chosen people**.²⁸³

Paul's imaginary non-Messianic **Jewish** opponent, introduced at **10:14-15**, has given up trying to prove that **Isra'el** is not responsible for its unbelief. **His** new tactic is to try to show that **Paul's** message, with its accusation of **Jewish** guilt for failing to **trust** in **Messiah**, is not merely unpleasant to **Jewish** ears but inconsistent with Scripture, and

therefore not to be taken seriously. If his opponent can make his point stick, **Paul's** case would be discredited on the grounds that it contradicts what **YHVH** has already revealed. **"In that case,"** says the opponent, "if **Isra'el** has, as you say, **'kept disobeying and contradicting'** (10:21), **isn't it** a necessary implication **that God has abandoned His people?"** **Paul's** imaginary opponent wants **him** to concede this point. But if **Paul** does, **he** must also admit the unacceptable implication that **ADONAI** has broken **His** word as promised in **the TaNaKh**, **"For ADONAI will not desert His people, He will not abandon His heritage"** (Psalm 94:14). **Paul's** imaginary opponent thinks he is very shrewd. If **Paul's** message requires believing in a **God** who breaks **His** word, then it is not **God's Word**, but **Paul's** message, that must be rejected.²⁸⁴

Paul's reply is couched in the strongest possible denial: **Heaven forbid** (Hebrew: *chalilah*, meaning *that's a contradiction, it makes no sense, may such a thing never occur*) (11:1a)! This is a good verse to repudiate Replacement Theology (see the commentary on **Galatians**, to see link click **[Ak - The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel](#)**). **Paul offers two proofs that God has not repudiated His people.**



The first proof is that Paul himself is a believer: **Paul's** denial comes from **his** own personal experience: **For I myself am a son of Isra'el, from the seed of Avraham of the tribe of Binyamin,** and **God** hasn't rejected me! The fact that **Paul** is a **Jewish** believer shows that the rejection is not total. **God has not abandoned His people whom He chose in advance.** So, how could **God abandon His people (11:1-2a)?** But someone might say, "You are just one person, and we might be able to find a few others as well. But the fact that only a small minority believe, and the majority do not, does that not show, in some sense, that **God has indeed abandoned His people?** **Paul** was adamant in **his** response: **Heaven forbid** (Hebrew: *chalilah*)!

Having begun with **himself**, **Paul** will prove in the rest of **Chapter 11** that - using the very words of **the TaNaKh** itself, which his imaginary opponent implies are contradicted by **Paul's** message - **God has not abandoned His people. For the sake of His great**

reputation, ADONAI will not abandon His people; because it has pleased ADONAI to make [the Jews] a people for Himself (First Samuel 12:22). Paul is not falling for His opponent's trick of trying to set his gospel message (see [As - Paul's Gospel](#)) in opposition to God's Word.

The second proof is that what is true of Isra'el has always been true of Isra'el. The majority of Israelites have always been in disobedience, and only a small minority, the righteous of the TaNaKh, have been believers. The majority of the Jews were only **circumcised** physically, but the believing remnant had **their hearts circumcised (2:29)**. To prove his point Paul goes back to the story of **Elijah**. And what was the point of that story? YHVH always has a remnant. As a matter of fact, **Elijah himself**, thought that he was the only **righteous one** left. So, Paul says to his imaginary opponent, "If you think otherwise, **don't you know what the TaNaKh says about Elijah? He pleads with God about the people of Isra'el, "ADONAI, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I'm the only one left, and now they want to kill me too!" But what is God's answer to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not knelt down to Ba'al" (Romans 11:2b-4; First Kings 19:10-18)**. Now seven thousand believers out of a whole nation is not very many. But it proved Paul's point. The majority of Israelites were in disobedience, but there has always been a small remnant that believed.²⁸⁵

Paul's argument is that **it's the same way in the present age, in every age**, even in the darkest times, **there is a remnant of Isra'el, the Messianic Jews, chosen, not by themselves, but by God's grace (11:5)**. But no one should use the fact that the believing remnant is in the minority to teach that **God has abandoned His people**. YHVH is at work fulfilling His promises in history, even when our eyes and ears seem to tell us differently.

Legalistic works and grace are mutually exclusive: The righteous of the TaNaKh is saved by **grace** and not by **legalistic works**. Paul reminds us: **Now if it is by grace, it is accordingly not based on legalistic works; if it were otherwise, grace would no longer be grace (11:6)**. So, no one, not even the Jew, can make any exclusive claim on God. He will save not only the Jews, but the Gentiles by **grace**. Non-Messianic Jews refused to submit to **Messiah's** righteousness in Paul's day, just as they refuse to do so today.²⁸⁶ Good **works** are the evidence of our salvation, not the means to our salvation.

Two examples of the present hardening of Isra'el: Returning to the thrust of his argument, Paul summarizes: **What follows is that the majority of Israelites have not**

attained the goal for which they *are* striving (not *was* striving, as in most translations, for this suggests that Isra'el is no longer striving for righteousness). **The ones chosen, the Messianic Jews, have obtained it through trusting** in the atonement that YHVH has provided in Yeshua, **but the rest have been made stonelike, just as the TaNaKh says, "God has given them a spirit of dullness - eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear, right down to the present day" (Romans 11:7-8; Moses in Deuteronomy 29:3; Isaiah 29:10).** Here again, Paul is referring to a distinction that **he** first made in 2:29. **Jews** were not to rely upon **the physical** signs of **circumcision, their Jewishness**, to be justified before ADONAI, but to rely upon **the circumcision of the heart** which leads to true praise. It is not a matter of **Gentiles** becoming spiritual **Jews**. There is no such thing. Spiritual **Jews** are **Jews** who have **circumcised their hearts**. The rest of Isra'el is **hardened**.²⁸⁷

As in 10:14-21, Paul doesn't give a tough answer without Scriptural support. Here three of Isra'el's major figures writing in the three main sections of **the TaNaKh, Moses in the Torah; Isaiah in the Prophets; and David in the Writings**, are shown to bear witness to Isra'el's **dullness, blindness, and deafness to God**, and resulting exile in Babylon (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)). Paul, who might otherwise be accused of arrogance or antisemitism, is seen instead of being in the tradition of the great **Jewish** prophets, on whom **he** is relying.²⁸⁸

And David says, "Let their dining table become for them a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a punishment (Romans 11:9; Psalm 69:22). "Dining table" doesn't refer to the kosher laws (which although complicated to the outsider, are hardly sufficiently complex to become a snare and a trap), but to the fellowship of meals, which is highly valued in Judaism, especially if "words of Torah" are exchanged. In the Oral Law (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)) we read, Rabbi Shim'on said, "If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken 'words of Torah,' it is as if they had eaten from the sacrifices of the dead; since it said: For all their tables are full of vomit and feces, without God present (Isaiah 28:8). But, if three have eaten at one table and have spoken 'words of Torah,' it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, blessed be He, since it is said: And he said to me, this is the table which is before ADONAI" (Ezeki'el 41:22).

But if **Jews** who reject the Gospel have conversations purporting to be **"words of Torah,"** then **their dining table** has indeed **become for them a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a punishment** - in the sense that when the worldview of non-Messianic **Jewish** life pervades the relaxed atmosphere of mealtimes, it becomes difficult for an individual **Jew** to recognize

Yeshua Messiah and come to **Him** in **trust**.

Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can't see, with their backs bent continually (Romans 11:10; Psalm 69:23). Their backs being **continually bent** symbolizes slavery, in this case, slavery to sin and its consequences. **Paul** quotes the Septuagint, or the Greek version of **the TaNaKh**, but the original Hebrew in **Psalm 69:23** is translated to make **their loins shake continually, loins** being understood as a center of strength. The Greek *dia pantos*, corresponding to the Hebrew *tamid*, is translated **continually**, not "forever," as in some translations. **Continually** means *all the time* or *at present*, while "forever" implies *always, now and in the future, and until the end of time*. Here, "forever" would be inconsistent with **God's** promises to **Isra'el**, and also what is said in **verses 11-32** immediately following.²⁸⁹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, What great love **You** have! How much **You** love is for the Jewish nation, **Isra'el**, **Your first-born child (Exodus 4:22)**. **You** long for them to come running to **You** in love, looking up to **You** as their **Lord** and **Savior** and then **You** would scoop them up in **Your** arms, giving them a big squeeze and hug for **You** so desire to love on them! Praise **You** for never giving up on **Your** children. Praise **You** that in **Your** love for **Isra'el**, **You** choose the great rabbi Saul (**Acts 9:15**) to both witness to **Gentiles** and to call **Isra'el** into a loving relationship with **You**. **Your** offer of love is so fantastic (**First John 3:1**)!*

*Saul so desires to encourage his own people, the Jews, to see **You, God**, as their salvation, and not to rely on their own works thru Torah observance. Much like that self-sufficient thinking of the Jews, many today have their needs met and so they see no need of a **Savior**. Please dear Heavenly **Father**, open the hearts of my family and friends to see the joy of heaven that you have for all who choose to follow you. Please let them seek after your righteousness (**Second Corinthians 5:21**). May they long for the wonderful personal relationship with you as **Lord** and **Savior**. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all - richly generous to all who call on Him. For "Everyone who calls upon the name of ADONAI shall be saved" (Romans 10:9-13).***

*Praise **Your** great love that is like the great love of the prodigal son's father who was looking and longing for his son to return home in repentance, so he could forgive him and welcome him back into the family. **But while he was still far away, his father saw him***

*and felt compassion. He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him . . . Bring the fattened calf and kill it! Let's celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life - he was lost and was found!' Then they began to celebrate (Luke 15:20, 23-24). You are a wonderful, loving and very patient Heavenly Father who so desires all to come to you in love- both your Jewish children thru father Abraham's **faith (Romans 4:12)** and Gentile children with **faith** like father Abraham's **(Romans 4:11)**. I both bow before in worship and I jump up and hug in love! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection*