

The Place of the Jews in God's Plan

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that through it you continue to speak to us. And what you have to say is still very much relevant for us today. And so we pray, Heavenly Father, that you might give us ears to hear, minds to understand, and hearts that would live in light of what you tell us today.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, one day my brother-in-law, Daniel, was at home and he was running late for university.

And at that time, Michelle's family still had the family dog called Sam. I think I've told you about Sam before. Sam the dog was more important than me as the son-in-law.

In fact, on the fridge were photos of the kids, including one photo of Michelle and I together. We were married at that stage. And there was a photo of Sam the dog. And the photo of Sam the dog just, I'm sure it was an accident, happened to just cover my face.

Not Michelle's face, just was over the top of my face. Accident, I'm sure. Anyway, Daniel was running late for university and so he had to feed Sam the dog quickly. And so he grabbed a frozen meat pie from the freezer and tossed it on the back lawn and drove off to university.

[1 : 10] Now when we heard that, we kind of, why on earth did you do that? We said, it sounded crazy. But then he said, oh look, I figured the pie would soften slowly in the sun and as it softened, Sam would have a bit to eat throughout the morning.

And when he got back, it apparently had worked. I don't know how he knew that. To paraphrase Shakespeare, there was method in his madness. His plan sounded crazy, but it wasn't that crazy after all.

I don't know if you've ever heard someone do something that sounds crazy and thought, what on earth are they doing? I need to discover that it wasn't crazy after all. Kind of like those old wives tales, not wives tales, but those things that, you know, people like washing the saucepans with a lemon.

Sounds crazy, but it actually gets rid of those rainbow kind of discolourations and the white stuff. Or another one I read, but one person put fresh slices of cucumber on the pantry shelves.

Why? Well, apparently it keeps cockroaches away. I mean, it sounds crazy, but there was method in the madness. At least until the cucumber goes off, I guess. Well, as we come to chapter 11 in Romans today, this is what we'll see about God's plan for the Jews.

[2 : 18] People thought it was crazy that he hadn't saved many of the Jews. Remember, that's what the issue these chapters, 9, 10 and 11, have been about.

But chapters 9 to 11 are addressing why God has not saved all Israel. After all, God has promised to be their God and they his people.

They are historically known as God's people. And yet not many of them have believed in God's son. Seems crazy. And so the question behind chapters 9 to 11 has been, if the gospel is true, Paul, why are not all Israelites saved?

Surely they of all people should be. And we've seen the first two parts of Paul's answer to this so far, haven't we? At first in chapter 9, we've seen that God's promise always only chose some to receive mercy.

And then in chapter 10, we saw that only some of the Israelites themselves chose to believe. And today in chapter 11, we'll see that while God's plan for the Jews might seem crazy, it isn't after all.

[3 : 22] It had a purpose. The purpose to bring mercy to both Gentiles and more Jews. But before getting into the chapter, it's worth pointing out that you might be thinking that this chapter about the Jews doesn't have much to do with you.

Because you're not a Jew. Although, do we have any Jews here? Have any of you got a Jewish background here? No? So we're all Gentiles here. Okay? Non-Jews. And so we might think this chapter has nothing to say to us.

But here's the thing, right? Our faith is based on Jesus being the Christ, the King, the Messiah. Which is a thoroughly Jewish concept.

And the concept of the Messiah comes from the Old Testament scriptures, which are or is the Jewish Bible. And so whether we realize it or not, we Christians are linked with the Jewish people. They are like our unbelieving cousins, if you like, or those who don't believe, at least. And so we should be interested in what God says about them. What's more, this chapter teaches us that their place in God's plan actually does have something to do with us, us Gentiles.

[4 : 28] And it will teach us the kind of response we're to have. But you're going to have to work hard for it, I'm afraid to say, because again, it's not an easy chapter.

The good news is next week on chapter 12, it gets much easier. So this chapter, chapter 11, is structured around the two questions. One in verse 1, and then another question in verse 11. So let's pick it up at point 1 and chapter 11, verse 1. Paul asks, sorry, I'm in Matthew 11, that's not going to help me. Paul asks, I ask then, did God reject his people?

That's the question. Did God reject his people? Paul ended in chapter 10, you just have to look, move your eyes just above a bit, to see that Israel had stubbornly refused to believe in Jesus.

They were an obstinate people. And so if that's the case, then chapter 11, verse 1, has God rejected them all? It's a natural question to ask. And do you see Paul's answer, chapter 11, verse 1? By no means.

[5 : 31] No way, Jose. And to prove it, he gives us two examples of Jews who do believe, and so are accepted, not rejected. And the first example is himself.

So the rest of verse 1, he says, I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. He's saying, I am thoroughly Jewish, and yet I believe.

And the second example, though, is of a whole group whom God has chosen and not rejected. So verse 2, he says, And God did not reject his people whom he foreknew or chose.

Don't you know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah that we heard from our first reading? How he appealed to God against Israel. Lord, they've killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left.

And they're trying to kill me too. And what was God's answer to him? Well, I have reserved for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace, he says.

[6 : 39] The word remnant here means a remaining group, a faithful few. So, for example, most of you will have heard about how the Essendon Football Club got into trouble and none of its first grade players were allowed to play this season.

And so some supporters have given up following their games and supporting them, watching the TV. But at our church, we have a faithful few who continue to support and watch every game. Hands up to the Bombers supporters here.

There are two over there. That's a remnant. A faithful few. A remaining group. And what does Paul say? He's saying, just like in the Old Testament time, in the time of Elijah, when he thought he was the only one left, God said, no, you're not.

I've reserved a remnant who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And then he says, verse 5, just like back then, so too in this present time, there is a remnant of Jews, chosen by God, who believe in Jesus.

And so Paul and the Jewish Christians in Rome are not the only ones either, you see. God has not rejected all his people. No, no, there are some who believe. There are some who have been chosen by grace to receive mercy, to receive righteousness.

[7 : 52] That is, to be made right with God and saved from hell. But what about the rest of them? Well, verse 7, what then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly, that's righteousness, end of chapter 9 tells us that, they did not obtain.

The elect among them did, but what about the rest? Well, the others were hardened. As it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day.

And David says, may their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see and their backs spent forever. Here Paul says, Israel earnestly sought righteousness, to be right with God, but Israel on the whole did not obtain this righteousness.

Verse 7 says, only the elect, those God chose, the remnant, did obtain that righteousness. And the rest of Israel, well, verse 7 again, they were hardened.

And they did not believe in Jesus. And so their unbelief became a snare for them. God hardened them in their unbelief.

[9 : 02] He gave them eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear because they did not want to see and they did not want to hear. And so the question then comes, well, what happens to those people?

Is that it for them? God hasn't rejected all of Israel. He saved the remnant. But what about those he's hardened? Are they beyond hope? Well, here we come to the next question.

Point 2, verse 11. Again, I ask, did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? You see what he's asking? He's saying, are those whom God has hardened beyond the hope of recovery?

Has God written them off? Well, again, his answer is not at all. Rather, they have been hardened in their transgression, hardened in their rejection of the gospel for a purpose.

You see the rest of verse 11? He says, rather, because of their transgression, their rejection of Jesus, salvation has come to the Gentiles and in order to make Israel envious.

[10 : 08] See, God has hardened them, the Jews, in their rejection of Jesus so that they would push the gospel away. And it would go to the Gentiles and bring us salvation. We see this in Paul's ministry, where Paul went about preaching the gospel.

He would always go to the Jews first because the gospel is first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. They were meant to be his people. But when they rejected the gospel, Paul then went to the Gentiles.

So on the next slide, we have a quote from Acts chapter 13. We read, You see, God hardened Israel in the rejection of Jesus so that the gospel would go to us Gentiles, even us here in Australia. And we could receive God's mercy. We could be saved. But God's plan didn't end there. There's another purpose. See verse 11 again. As salvation came to the Gentiles, as we enjoy the blessings first promised to the Jews, well, the purpose is that the Jews might then become envious, that they might want back in.

And so the logic of God's plan is like this on the next slide. God hardens most Jews, so the gospel goes to us Gentiles, which provokes the Jews and then saves some of them as well.

[11 : 40] That's the logic. And he repeats this plan of God's throughout this passage. So, for example, in verse 13, he says, I'm talking to you Gentiles.

Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry. Literally, I boast about my ministry. Why? Because he wants to show off? No, verse 14, in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

I remember being on Cresh one time. I think it was, we're having a day here at church. It might have been a marriage prep day. I can't remember. And I was on Cresh looking after some of your kids.

And I remember, I won't say which kids, but I do remember offering one of them a toy to play with. And they turned their nose up and, I want that kind of thing. And so I offered the same toy to another child who took it joyfully and started to play with it.

Guess what? The first child saw and wanted it back. That's what Paul has in mind here. Paul takes pride, literally boasts in his ministry to the Gentiles, in order to almost deliberately bait the Jews.

[12 : 59] To show them that the Gentiles are now enjoying the blessings God first promised to the Jews. So the Jews might wake up and reconsider Jesus as the Christ. And so they won't miss out.

In fact, I know a Jewish guy who has given some evangelistic talks to Jews before. And in his talks, he often includes these lines. These are his words. He says, That's what he's doing when he gives the talks, based on what Paul says here.

In fact, that's what Paul seems to have done. He boasts of his Gentiles' ministry to provoke a response. Now, I'm sure for some Jews, it simply made them even more hardened to the gospel.

In fact, today, some Jewish rabbis teach that becoming a Christian is worse than killing a person. But for other Jews, it might lead them to reconsider Jesus and be saved, says Paul.

But the question is, why is Paul still trying to save some of them? Well, because he knows God has not finished with them. God has not written them off. They are not beyond recovery, beyond hope. [14:22] Even some of those he's hardened, he still plans to save. What's more, when the full number of Jews God has chosen are saved, it will mean the return of Jesus with the riches of glory and the resurrection of the dead.

Have a look at verse 12. He says, Here, the greater riches, I think, refer to heaven, glory. And life from the dead refers to the resurrection of everyone's bodies on the last day when Jesus returns. In other words, Paul is saying, when the full number of Jews God has chosen are saved, Jesus will return, all will be raised to life, and it will be riches or heaven on earth.

Now, we don't know when the full number of Jews will come in, but that's not Paul's concern here. Rather, Paul's point here is that there are still more Jews to be saved now.

And so Paul is going around trying to make them jealous that he might save some. Now, I don't know about you, but I rarely think about the Jewish people today, let alone have Paul's concern for them, I must confess.

[15:55] I mean, I just simply don't know many. I know one, actually. And there aren't many around Doncaster that I know of. And so I tend to forget about them. But Paul's point here is that God has not.

Indeed, there is something special about them, for they are God's original people. And so we shouldn't forget about them either. And we certainly shouldn't do what the Gentiles were doing in the Roman church that Paul is writing this letter to.

Those Gentiles in the Roman church, they were actually looking down on these Jews. They couldn't understand how the Jews outside the church didn't believe the gospel. Can't you get it, guys? And they couldn't understand why the Jews inside the church, who did believe the gospel, still hung on to their Jewish customs.

Come on, guys, wake up, they'd say. And we'll see this in chapter 14. But here in verse 17, Paul reminds these Gentiles and us that the Jews are special.

And he tells the Gentiles in Rome to pull their head in. So have a look at verse 17. It says, If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, Gentiles, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others, and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other Jewish branches.

[17:14] If you do, consider this. You do not support the root, but the root supports you. Here, Paul uses a picture of an olive tree, which is a symbol for Israel.

So on the next slide, here's my olive tree, not to scale. And he's saying that the Jews, this represents the Jews, the original people of God.

Now, as we've heard, most of them rejected Jesus and were hardened in their unbelief. And so they were broken off the tree. So if you click next, we'll break them off.

And God did this so that some wild Gentile branches could be grafted in.

So click next. I chose purple because it's a bit of a wild color, bright purple. That's Gentiles grafted in. But notice here, we wild Gentile branches have been grafted into the original people of God.

[18:15] We are the newbies. Because the Jews are the originals. Which again is why the gospel is first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. And notice we are supported by the Jewish, the green root there, not the other way around.

And so Paul says Gentiles have no right to look down on the Jews and think that we're superior just because they're slow to get the gospel. What's more, we've only been grafted into God's people by faith, not because we're superior.

So have a look at verse 19. He says, True. But they were broken off because of unbelief.

And you also stand by faith or belief. So do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, the Jewish ones, he will not spare you either.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God. Sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off, he says.

[19:21] And here Paul says that some Jewish branches were broken off because they did not believe in Jesus. That's true. But we have only been grafted in by faith, by God's kindness, not by anything we have done.

And so if we start to think that we are superior, if we start to think it's because of how good we are, then watch out, says Paul. For if God broke off the natural Jewish branches when they did not

believe, then he'll certainly have no problem with breaking us wild purple branches off if we stop believing and start thinking it's about us.

So instead of arrogance, we had to have a humble fear. We had to consider the kindness and grace of God, that God was willing to harden some of his natural people just so that we wild ones could hear the gospel and be grafted into his people.

And we had to continue in that kindness, that grace, which first saved us with humble thanks. But do notice verse 23 and 24, because Paul again says there is still hope to save some more Jews. See verse 23? He says, And if they, those Jewish branches broken off, do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again.

[20 : 37] After all, if you were cut off out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, if God has been able to do that, then how much more readily will those natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

See, if some hardened Jews are provoked by envy to reconsider the gospel and believe in Jesus, then God is more than able to graft them in again. After all, it would be grafting them into their own olive tree.

And so if we click next, I think, here we go. That's the next bit of the picture. And so Paul again repeats God's plan for the Jews, so that we Gentiles won't be arrogant or conceited, but relate rightly to them.

So point three, verse 25, he says, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited, arrogant.

See, this is God's plan. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way, all Israel will be saved. As it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion.

[21 : 49] He will turn godlessness away from Jacob or Israel. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. You see, as far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake, you Gentiles' sake.

But as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, the promises God made to them. For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you were one time disobedient to God, and you Gentiles were one time disobedient to God and have now received mercy as a result of their Jewish disobedience, Well, so they too have now become disobedient, in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

For God has bound everyone over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on them all, both Jew and Gentile. See, Paul again explains that God's plan was to harden Israel in their unbelief for a while, so that the gospel would go to the Gentiles.

So verse 25, they have experienced the hardening in part, until the Gentiles come in. Verse 28, they are enemies of the gospel for the sake of the Gentiles. Verse 30, you Gentiles have received mercy because of their disobedience, their unbelief.

You see, God has hardened those Jews who do not believe, so that the gospel might come to us, and we might receive mercy. That was the first part of the plan. But the other part of God's plan was, this in turn would provoke the Jews to reconsider the gospel and be saved.

[23 : 20] For God has not written them off. Indeed, they are still his special people. So verse 25, their hardening was only in part. Not all were hardened, and not for all time.

Verse 28 to 29, they are still loved by God, because he elected or chose them as his people, and made promises to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And so verse 31, as a result of the mercy God shows us, they too might now, at least some of them, receive mercy. That's God's plan, you see.

Now, it might have looked like madness to some. Indeed, for some, it looked as though God's word and promise to Israel failed. But on the slide, on the next slide, I think it is, the question, remember, chapter 9, why not all Israel saved?

Well, God's word only ever chose some. And then we're reminded in chapter 10, that only some Israelites themselves chose to believe. And here in chapter 11, we're reminded that God's plan was to harden in part, so we could receive mercy, and in turn, more Jews would receive mercy too.

[24 : 27] You see, this plan is not madness, but it's marvelous. We would never have thought of it, and we may still not fully understand it, but the goal of God's plan was always mercy.

And so Paul concludes by praising God for his wisdom in this plan. You see verse 33? So what does all this mean for us Gentiles?

Well, two quick things to finish. First, the big point of the passage is that God has not forgotten nor finished with the people of Israel. Their hardening was only in part, and for a while, they are still special to him.

And so if God has not forgotten nor finished with the Jews, then neither should we be. We are to do what we can to see especially them saved, for they are the natural branches.

So why not add them to your prayers as you pray for people? Why not support groups like Christian Witness to Israel, which is on the next slide?

[25 : 48] I think I've got a picture of their webpage. There's other groups. One group is called Jews for Jesus, but they're under investigation for possibly being a cult, so don't go there.

Christian Witness to Israel is apparently the one to support. In fact, I think the principal of Ridley spoke at an event of theirs recently. In fact, as a church, I'm going to write to parish council and see if we can use some of our missionary budget to support evangelism amongst Jews.

For if God has not forgotten them, then neither should we be. That's the first point. The second point of application is where to remember the warning to us Gentiles. Now, I don't think any of us really look down on the Jews like the Gentiles did in the Roman church that Paul was writing to.

We can take that off now, Ryan. They can follow up with me later. I don't think anyone here really thinks they're superior to the Jews, but we are still to have a humble heart that gives thanks to God for what he's done for us.

I mean, God hardened some of his own people who did not believe, sure, but he still broke them off so that we wild Gentiles could be grafted in.

[26 : 58] That's extraordinary. We didn't deserve that. Indeed, God gave one particular Jew, his son, Jesus, to die for us, to be broken off even when he did not deserve it, so that we might be brought in, grafted in, part of the family.

And that ought to move us to humble thanks. Some of you might remember what happened to my family a couple of years ago when we went away on holidays. We arrived home late one night to find that while we were away, a family from this congregation installed a completely new bathroom for us.

No idea what was happening. Our bathroom, the family bathroom, was in disrepair, and the church was going to pay for some of the materials but couldn't afford the labor. But this family gave up some of their holidays to install a new bathroom for us.

And when we got back, we got back, we saw what had happened, and we were just overwhelmed. Michelle and I found it hard to talk. And we couldn't go to sleep for hours afterwards.

We just lay there marveling at this great act of kindness. Well, God has given up his only son to die for us, and even hardened some of his original people, broke them off, so that we Gentiles could be grafted in.

[28 : 20] We Gentiles who had no promises made to us originally, we Gentiles who had no claim to God have now received the mercy of God and been grafted into the family of God. We ought to keep marveling at God's act of kindness to us and join with Paul in praising God.

So let's do that now. Grab your Bibles, turn to verse 33, and we're going to say this prayer of praise together. So verse 33, let's say it together.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out.

Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen.