Why Did Israel Stumble?

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[0:00] We are in Romans chapter 11 this morning.

And so if you didn't bring your Bible or if you prefer,! you can use one of the Bibles that are scattered around in the chairs around you. And if you want to use one of those Bibles, you simply need to turn to page 946.
In those Bibles, and you'll find Romans 11 on 946. Otherwise, just flip through all the way to your New Testament, past the Gospels and Acts to the book of Romans. For those of you who haven't been with us, we have been walking through Romans for quite some time now.
And we've spent almost two years covering the first ten chapters and began chapter 11 last week. And so we're still toward the beginning of chapter 11. And we're going to begin in verse 11 this morning and go down to verse 15.
And one of the things that we do here at Church of the Cross is as we read God's Word, we stand together in honor of God's Word. So I want to ask you guys to stand once again as we read. Paul begins writing in verse 11.
[1:13] Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean?

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles, inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.
For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? Father, we give you thanks for this Word and pray for insight and understanding this morning.
We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. One of the first things that you'll realize if you spend very much time around small children or if you have kids is you'll realize very quickly that they have a lot of questions.
A lot of questions about a lot of different things. But the most difficult questions that they ask are always the ones that begin with the word why. It's no big deal for them to ask me, what color is the sky?
[2:37] Well, it's kind of gray right now, but normally it's blue. But if they say, well, why is the sky blue? Then I have a decision to make. Either I can try to remember what I learned in some science class 20 years ago and explain to them exactly why the sky is blue.

Or I can say, I don't know, it just is blue. It's blue. That's the color of the sky. But even if I do give them an answer, they'll probably follow that up with, but why? Because they always want to know why.
They're always asking. They're always digging and getting a little bit further. And the Apostle Paul begins the passage that we're looking at this morning with a kind of why question. He doesn't use the word why, but that's essentially what he's asking.
He wants to know why God has done something that God has in fact done. Notice how he words his question in verse 11. He says, so I ask, did they, that's a reference to the people of Israel, to the Jewish people, did they stumble in order that they might fall?
Those words in order that show that he's asking a why question. Why did they stumble? Was it just so that they would fall? Now I need to remind you exactly what he's talking about here because if you're just jumping in with us this morning, you've no idea what's going on here.
[3:47] Paul has been discussing since the beginning of chapter 9 the issue of the failure of the Jewish people to embrace and believe in Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Jesus has come in fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about him. He has come to be the fulfillment of all of the hopes of the people of Israel. And yet the apostle Paul himself, a Jew, finds

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himself in the position of realizing and acknowledging that the vast majority of the Jewish people in his day, and we can extend that to our day as well, have in fact rejected the very one who is the fulfillment of all of their hopes.
They have not received him. And so he says early on in chapter 9 that they are accursed and cut off. He says, I wish that I myself could be accursed and cut off for the sake of my kinsmen.
He says in chapter 10 that his great desire is that they might be saved. Saved how? By faith in Jesus, the very one whom they have rejected.
So the apostle Paul was addressing a situation that for him looms large in his mind. And it should for us as well. If we read the Old Testament and we see all these massive promises that God gives to the people of Israel, and then we look around us today and we see that very, very few of the people of Israel are actually receiving the fulfillment of those promises through Jesus, then we have to ask the question, what's happening here?
[5:22] What's going on? And Paul has given us two answers to that question. He has said, on the one hand, we can consider this from the perspective of God's sovereignty. And so from the perspective of God's sovereignty, there has always been within the physical descendants of Abraham a select chosen few that he calls the remnant.

And all of the remnant, all of the chosen, do believe in Christ and they are receiving the promises. And so those that he calls the Israel within Israel, the true Israel, they are receiving the promises. So from the perspective of God's sovereignty, we would say that yes, the true Israel is receiving the promises. The rest of physical Israel are cut off from Christ because this is God's plan for redemptive history.
Or you can consider it the way that he does in chapter 10. And you can say, the reason that they have stumbled and the reason that they are now lost is because they don't have faith in Christ. Instead, they want to earn their own standing before God by obeying the law and checking off all these to-do lists and doing all these things. And Paul says, that won't work. And because that won't work, therefore they are cut off.
[6:31] But now the question becomes, okay, if in fact, ultimately, the situation that Paul is addressing of the lostness of the Jewish people is due to God's plan, then he asks, then why?

Where's this headed? Granted, they have stumbled. We know that. They haven't trusted in Christ. And granted, that's a part of God's plan for redemptive history. But now Paul is asking, but why have they stumbled?
Have they just stumbled so that they can fall? In other words, is there no greater purpose of their failing to believe in Jesus beyond their own condemnation? Is there nothing more to this than that? Is that all there is to it? Paul is saying, why? Is there some deeper, greater reason for the failure of the people of Israel to believe in Christ at this particular time?
Is there reason for their stumbling? Is it just so that they would be lost? And Paul says, by no means. It's not simply so that they would fall. There's a greater reason.
[7:36] God is doing something. He's working out a plan. And the rest of chapter 11 is devoted to describing to us what God's plan is concerning the present lostness of the vast majority of the people of Israel.

And it unfolds in two stages. You can see them. He lays them out for us already in the passage that we're looking at this morning. Stage number one is that because of their rejection of Christ, the gospel is going to the Gentiles and people other than the Jewish people are being saved.
That's stage one. You see it very clearly in verse 11. He says, rather, in the middle of verse 11, through their trespass, so Israel's rejection of Christ, through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles.
He says in verse 12, their trespass means riches for the world. He says their failure means riches for the Gentiles. Or you can move down to verse 15.
Their rejection, the rejection of the Jewish people, means the reconciliation of the world. Over and over through chapter 11, he is saying that stage one of God's plan in terms of the stumbling of Israel is that the gospel would go to the Gentiles and many, many Gentiles would be saved.
[8:55] That's what's happening. In verse 17, he says the Gentiles are grafted in along with the people of Israel. They are grafted into the nourishing root of the olive tree.

In verse 24, he speaks of this again. He says that they're grafted in. So they're getting to experience all the promises made to Abraham. He says down in verse 25, he refers to the fullness of the

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Gentiles coming in.
So over, over, and over, we have this reference to the saving of the Gentiles directly because of the rejection of Christ by the Jewish people.
You remember Paul's pattern that we've mentioned several times as he would spread the gospel from city to city in the Roman Empire. He would go into a city and first he would go to the Jewish people.
First he would go to the synagogue and preach the gospel there. And without fail, they would by and large reject his message so that he would then turn and begin to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.
[9:55] And we see over and over through Paul's preaching, many, many Gentiles would in fact be saved. And this is a part of God's plan. This is what God intended to do all along.

But that's not all of his plan. That's not the only thing that God is doing. In fact, here's a stage two to the plan. Stage one is, since the Jews have rejected the gospel, it's now preached to the Gentiles and many Gentiles are saved.
But notice stage two. All the way back up in verse 11 again. Through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles. So as to make Israel jealous.
So it doesn't end with Gentiles being saved. Once the Gentiles are saved, Paul says, many of the people of Israel look and see the blessings that the Gentiles have now received.
They become jealous. He makes it clear what he means by that. Verse 14. He wants to make his fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.
[10:58] So that's the course of events. Rejection of Christ by the Jews. Christ received by the Gentiles to whom the gospel is now preached. And then the Jews, seeing the Gentiles receive the blessings, the promises made to their forefathers, then become jealous.

And some of the Jews are then saved. So there's a grand master plan being worked out here by God through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.
And if you say, but why would God do it that way? The reason is because that's how he said he was going to do it all along. God told the people of Israel that this is how things would unfold.
He told them over and over that through them, the blessings that he had given to them would go to all the nations. That the blessings of God were not to be held on to and bottled up by the descendants of Abraham.
That they would go out far and wide to the other nations. And that's not something that God added on later. That's something that was there from the very beginning of God's dealings with the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham himself.
[12:02] In fact, I want you to hold your place in Romans 11 and turn all the way back to the book of Genesis because it's important for us to actually see some of this with our own eyes. to see that God said these things way back in the beginning of the nation of Israel.

So, if you go back to Genesis chapter 12 where we have the first mention of Abraham where God calls Abraham who at the time was just a pagan worshiper of false gods and God calls Abraham to himself and sends him out away from his family.
Genesis chapter 12 verse 1 His name is Abram here. He's not yet been called Abraham. But it says that the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.
And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
I'm going to bless you and your descendants, Abraham. But through you and through your descendants I'm also going to bless all of the families of the earth.
[13:12] So from the very beginning of the nation of Israel before they're a nation before Abraham has a single child God tells Abraham what he's going to do through his descendants.

He's going to bless all of the nations. Turn over a couple of pages in your Bible to chapter 18 where God again comes and speaks to Abraham. And he says in verse 17 the Lord says shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.
God says I've got to continue to involve Abraham in what I'm doing because I told him that I would bless him and that through him all the nations would be blessed. But it's not just Abraham because

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this promise is passed on to Abraham's children to Abraham's grandchildren.
Turn over a few more pages to chapter 28 where God speaks the promise once again. He says in verse 14 your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
So the promises are passed on not just given to Abraham but passed on to his children to his grandchildren. The very crucial promise that all the nations all the families on the face of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendants.
[14:51] And of course Paul tells us in Galatians that that the descendants of Abraham the seed of Abraham is ultimately found and discovered in Jesus Christ the descendant of Abraham who becomes the seed capital S in whom all the nations are blessed as they turn to him in faith.

So this is something that God said was going to happen from the very beginning that the gospel would go to the Gentiles through the people of Israel. It's just that it's happened now through Israel's rejection of the gospel.
But that's also something that the Old Testament spoke of. In fact we don't even have to turn back to the Old Testament. If you're back in Romans you can just look up in Romans chapter 10 because in Romans chapter 10 Paul quoted Deuteronomy chapter 32 in verse 19 and he reminds us of something that God said through Moses long long ago.
Through Moses God said I will make you jealous speaking to Israel of those who are not a nation and with a foolish nation I will make you angry.
All the way back in Deuteronomy as Moses spoke to the people of Israel God said through Moses there will come a time when I will make you jealous through other nations.
[16:13] Nations that you regard and are in fact foolish nations wayward nations currently worshipping false gods I will make you jealous by those nations. Paul is saying now to us in Romans chapter 11 that those events the blessing of the Gentile nations the making jealous of the Jews as the gospel goes to the Gentiles those things are happening right now in what we call the church age.

Those things are unfolding before us Paul says so it should not come as a great surprise when he says now why did Israel stumble? The answer is because God said it was through their stumbling that the gospel would go to the nations and then by the jealousy produced by the nations receiving the gospel then Jews would begin to receive and accept the truth about who Christ is all of these things unfolding because of God's sovereign plans for all of history and because of God's commitment to create a people for himself from among all the nations of the earth this is what God is doing this is a great and grand and glorious design that God has for all of history now there is there is a a very sort of large issue of interpretation that we're really going to get to in about two weeks as we continue on in Romans 11 that I need to alert you to this morning because before I can go about applying anything that Paul is saying here in these verses I need to alert you to how I'm understanding all of chapter 11 okay so there are statements made throughout chapter 11 regarding the jealousy of the Jews and their conversion to Christ there are two in particular that I want to direct your eyes toward one is in the passage we're looking at this morning look at verse 12 he says at the end speaking of the Jews how much more will their full inclusion mean some translations say how much more will their fullness mean how much more will their full number what it says literally is if their failure means riches for the Gentiles how much more their fullness that's what it says literally so there's the fullness of Israel mentioned here and then if you move much further down in the chapter all the way down to verse 26 after having spoken of the fullness of the Gentiles Paul says in verse 26 in this way through the coming in of the Gentiles in this way all Israel will be saved and so the big interpretive question over Romans chapter 11 is what does
Paul mean when he says all Israel will be saved and what does he mean when he talks about the fullness of Israel what is that a reference to and there there are three basic interpretations of what Paul means by this and I'm just going to tell them to you briefly this morning pointing the direction that I'm headed in two weeks I'll tell you why I'm headed in that way in more detail alright so don't just come today you have to at least come back in two weeks you're committed now you've got to be here so the three interpretations are basically this one and this is probably at least today the most popular interpretation that I have found out there is that Paul is speaking of the future of events surrounding the return of Christ and he's saying that around the time of the return of Christ and some would say before his return some would say after his return we're not going to deal with

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that but around the time of the coming of Christ many would say Paul is predicting a massive conversion of the Jews who are alive at that time to Christ so that all Israel refers in this interpretation to the vast number of Jewish people alive at the end of world history when Christ returns that's how many people interpret it others interpret it to mean not a reference to the future not a reference to something that's going to happen but as a reference to what is happening currently right now throughout the church age so that it's happening during Paul's ministry and it's going to continue to happen all the way up until the return of Christ so it's not something necessarily future it's happening in the present and within that there are two interpretations of this phrase all Israel one interpretation says that all Israel refers to spiritual
Israel and is another term for the church so that when he says all Israel will be saved through the coming in of the Gentiles what they're saying Paul is saying here is that the Gentiles complete Israel without the grafting of the Gentiles you don't have all of spiritual Israel spiritual Israel is the church and therefore when he says all Israel will be saved what he's saying is that God is in the business of saving all of those from the Jews from the Gentiles who belong to him and when he's done with that we will be able to say definitively that all spiritual Israel has been saved and there's a third interpretation very very similar to that one that says it's happening throughout church history it's happening in the present but this all Israel is not a reference to the church it is a reference to all of those chosen Israelites that Paul has called the remnant throughout these three chapters Romans 9 through 11 so that there's a possibility that this passage may be talking about events in the future there's the possibility that may be talking about the conversion of all
[21:57] Jews and Gentiles throughout the church period church age whoever is converted or it may just be talking about those select Jews those that he called the Israel within Israel earlier in chapter 9 he said not all who are of Israel belong to Israel not all who are children of Abraham are actually his offspring and so the idea would be here that he's talking about those who are the true children of Abraham from within the Jewish people so three interpretations and some of you are going I lost you at one I have no idea what you're talking about at this point that's alright we're coming back in two weeks I'll give even more detail and then you'll have it nailed down then but the reason that I'm mentioning all of those things to you is because I know that the main interpretation if any of you have ever heard anybody teach or preach over this I know that the main interpretation of this chapter is that Paul is speaking of a mass conversion of Jewish people at the time of the return of Christ and I do not interpret this chapter that way so that changes the way in which

I would apply this chapter to us I understand Paul to be speaking of all of the elect Jews all of the remnant throughout church history who are saved so that this is not something that we are hoping for and looking for in the future this is happening now it's happening now it happened as Paul preached the gospel as he was rejected by the synagogue and then turned to the Gentiles and he preached the gospel to the Gentiles there would still after that be a conversion of some Jews who saw the Gentiles saw them rejoicing in the reception of the promises and they wanted to be included in that and so their jealousy stirred up in them and led them to faith in Christ and that's a pattern that is repeated throughout church history which means that it's a pattern that we can expect to happen today but I think it points us in the direction of not simply the unfolding of God's plan for redemptive history with reference to Jews and Gentiles
I think it's giving us some pointers to how God sometimes saves some people because I don't think that it's just the Jewish people who at times will look at Christians and say they've got something that I'm missing I'm now jealous to have that I don't think it's just Jewish people that do that that's what Paul is speaking of here but I think we can broaden that and say that it's very likely in fact we know that it is the case that sometimes there are non-Christians who will look at us and think they have something that I am missing and that jealousy can be something that God uses to move them to repentance and faith in Jesus now that may seem surprising to some of us Paul's language about jealousy throughout here may seem surprising to us at times because we always think of jealousy as a negative thing but it's not always negative it can't be because God is said to be jealous at times it's not always negative and God can use jealousy to further his own purposes to accomplish his plans within our lives within our hearts within the lives of our loved ones so it's not always negative jealousy is not the same thing as coveting coveting is when you want something that does not belong to you and you have no rightful claim upon when God is jealous for his own name he's jealous for something that ought to be his the honor and glory and praise that he deserves and now

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Paul says there can arise within the heart of a lost person as they see the blessings and benefits of being a Christian there can arise within them a great desire to share in that he calls it jealousy and it's not negative it's one of the many means that God uses to save and to rescue people from their sins and so we need to be continually aware of the reality that people around us see us they are aware many times that we call ourselves followers of Christ they are aware that we say that we are Christians and so we ought to live lives we ought to have a lifestyle we ought to be people who are vocal enough about all the blessings and promises of God that we receive about the salvation that we have through Christ we ought to be vocal enough about that that people are aware of that and they see it as something that they themselves would in fact want but I'm afraid that so many times rather than being willing to display the great joy that we have in being united to Christ instead of displaying the things that uniquely make us followers of Jesus many times we have our sights set on just not looking like religious fanatics to people around us so many times we think to ourselves and we will spiritualize it

I've done it probably more times than you have we will spiritualize that desire and we'll think to ourselves if I can just get these people to see me as normal and not a fanatic if they'll just think that I'm a lot like them and normally I'm not going to engage in immorality but as long as I just want them to think that I'm more like them and if they will think that maybe then I'll get the chance someday to show them why I'm not like them and tell them about the gospel and that always backfires on us that doesn't work I think it would be like Harry Houdini the great magician taking a job in a cubicle at an office and spending all of his time at the company Christmas party trying to impress people with his ability to print out spreadsheets just like they do do some card tricks man tie yourself up with some chains and escape and you'll impress your co-workers do something you're not like everybody else you're a master musician magician I can't say the word you're a master at this do something be who you are and that that will draw their attention well

[28:11] Christians are different from the rest of the world we're not we don't have the same set of beliefs that they have we don't have the same hopes that they have we don't have the same values that the world has and it's only when we put on display the ways in which we are different and we have to actually say those things sometimes it's only when we put those on display that people even have the opportunity to become jealous of the great gift of salvation that we have so that they might turn to Christ some of you might be thinking but I don't know what they would be jealous of about me because I do feel like I'm pretty much just average and normal compared to all of my neighbors I don't feel that I'm all that different and that may be a signal that may be a sign that you don't yet belong to Christ that may be a sign that you haven't really fully trusted in him that it's it's just a ritual that you go through you just you come to church and you do things because you like the way that it makes you feel but you don't have a part in Christ yet to which I would say repent and believe in him but it may be that you just don't quite yet realize how much they are lacking and how desperately they need to see what they are lacking in you and in your life

I can think of a couple of examples very easily and very quickly we can see one in Romans for instance turn back a couple of pages in your Bibles Romans chapter 5 where Paul has spent at least two chapters really digging into what it means to be made right with God what it means to be justified to be saved by the work of Christ and then he says in chapter 5 verse 1 therefore in light of all those things therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ since we have been justified since that is true about us now there is something else that is true about us and that is we now have peace with God we were at war with him his wrath hung over us as sinners but now that we belong to Christ now that we have trusted in him all the wrath of God has been dealt with on the cross and now we have real lasting eternal peace between us and the judge of all the earth we have real peace that is something that no one other than the followers of Christ can truthfully claim to have only those who have trusted in Christ and received the free gift of righteousness from him only they can truly say that they have peace with God which obviously results in another kind of peace the peace that Peter mentions that passes all understanding there is peace with God which is the ending of the war the removal of judgment from us and only we can have that but because we know that we have that because we know that Paul says in Romans 10 1 there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ because of that we can then have another kind of peace peace in the midst of whatever life throws our way to know that God is sovereign and he is in charge and our ultimate destiny is already determined we can have something that the world lacks and they can begin to see that in our lives they see

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when we suffer how we respond and they think I cannot
I could not respond like that in that situation I could not do that they began to see the peace that we have because we have peace with God or I think of Jesus words in the gospel of John chapter 13 where Jesus looks at his disciples and he says a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you so you should love one another and then he says by this all men will know that you are my disciples that you love one another there is a kind of love and connection among Christians and between Christians that does not exist in the world at large and I say that because it's a connection that exists automatically between the followers of Christ it's a connection that transcends racial barriers it's a connection that transcends socio-economic barriers so that whether you're the richest of the rich or the poorest of the poor because you're in
Christ you are a member of the same family of God there is a kind of unity that binds the body of Christ together that cannot be found out in the world precisely because it transcends all the barriers that the world would erect between us so that we see in the world we see love we see it where we expect to see it love is natural between a parent and a child I mean you may not always like your kids right but you love them you can't help it I've even seen the parents of serial killers interviewed on TV and they abhor the things that their child has done and who they have become and yet they say but I still love them I mean there are places where we find deep abiding love in the world but it's not like the love that we experience this is not natural it's not natural for some of you to love each other
[33:56] I'm watching it's not normal you're just too different from one another and we're not even all that diverse here but still you're just too different from one another and yet when push comes to shove there's a kind of love there that cannot be explained in any other way and Jesus says that it's by this kind of love that the world will see and know that you are in fact my disciples we could probably multiply this tenfold the blessings and benefits of belonging to Christ of having embraced Christ and all that comes along with that so many things that we possess that we sometimes don't know about that the world simply doesn't have and God has it in mind to use many of those things to provoke jealousy in some of the non-Christians around us and then through that to turn them to Christ so the book of Acts tells us that when

Paul entered a particular city all those who were appointed to eternal life believed and sometimes we read verses like that or sometimes we read some of the things that Paul has been saying in these chapters about election and about God's choice and his sovereign grace and sometimes we read those and we think I guess if God's going to do what he's going to do he's just going to do it and yet we're seeing right here the unfolding of events that take place in the lives of real people the apostle Paul cites his own life and his own ministry as a prime example he says I'm magnifying my ministry because I'm an apostle to the Gentiles this is happening as he travels and preaches these things are really really happening so that a way becomes open yes God is sovereign but he uses means he finds a way he finds a pathway to work out his sovereign plan and sometimes that happens through the provoking of jealousy as those who have previously rejected
Christ become jealous of those who know Christ in a saving way and listen to how he talks listen to the things that he says look at verse 15 if their rejection that is the rejection of the Jewish people means the reconciliation of the world what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead what does he mean by that I think that he means that if their rejection of the gospel resulted in many people being saved what will their salvation result in except their own spiritual life they are dead in sins and yet now through this entire process life is going to flood into them by the sovereign working of God and they will be alive who were once dead this is an incredible miraculous work and God does not necessarily always do his miraculous works in ways that appear to be miraculous to us but through your normal ordinary living of the
Christian life through your normal ordinary pursuit of Christ rather than conformity to standards around you God might begin to use you so that all those appointed to eternal life provoked by jealousy might believe let's pray voy voy!
voy!

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