

God's Word Will Not Fail

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Date: 15 November 2015

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[0 : 0 0] I mentioned earlier that we're going to do an overview of Romans 9, 10, and 11 this morning,¹ which is much different than what we normally do.

I don't usually get past more than a paragraph at a time, sometimes not even that far, and I'm going to try to cover three chapters without keeping you here for three days. So we're going to do our best this morning.

But I want you to focus your eyes now on chapter 11 as we finish reading through this great section of Romans. And I want you guys, if you would, to stand with me as we read Romans 11.

Paul writes, I ask then, has God rejected His people? By no means. For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your oracles, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.

[1 : 1 3] But what is God's reply to him? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

For if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.

As it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day. And David says, Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution for them.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see and bend their backs forever. So I ask, Did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means.

Rather, through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 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?

[2 : 1 6] Now, I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order that 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? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others, and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.

If you are, remember, it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, Branches were broken off, so that I might be grafted in. That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith.

So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note then the kindness and severity of God, severity toward those who have fallen, but kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness.

[3 : 20] Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in. For God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree?

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers. A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness 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, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake.

But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy.

For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

[4 : 40] For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. Father, we give you thanks for this text. And I pray this morning that we would not be distracted by the complicated matters in the passage, but that we would be able to see with clear eyes and to feel with hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit the great truths present here in these chapters.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. There's a lot going on in the world around us.

We've mentioned some of it in prayer. There's a lot happening. We see on the news, we see the terrorist attacks happening in Paris, France. We're reminded that those things happen, though, not just on a rare occasion in other parts of the world.

We know that in places like Africa and the Middle East, those kinds of attacks happen much more frequently, much more often. And so we're caused to think about that. We think about our own lives.

[5 : 56] Sometimes we pause and we look at our lives and we think, things are not turning out in the way that I thought they would. Things are not headed in the direction that I thought that they would go. And in the midst of all of that, sometimes we can be tempted to doubt some of God's promises.

That's what these chapters really address. They address the question as to whether or not the promises of God are really going to come through.

Is God going to fulfill His Word? So we need to hear these chapters. Yes, we're going to spend several weeks working our way through, verse by verse, through these three chapters.

But we need to hear them. We need to know that the promises of God are safe and secure because there will be things happening in the world around us, things happening in our lives now that will at times cause us to wonder or to doubt, to be confused about, well, I thought you said you were going to do this and yet this is what I'm seeing in the world.

This is what I'm seeing in my life. And so I want us this morning to just take the bird's eye view of Romans 9 through 11 so that we can see how Paul answers the question of the truthfulness, the certainty of God's Word and all of His promises.

[7 : 13] But for us to see that, we need to understand, first of all, the context of Romans 9. We spent three months now in Romans 8. We spent three months wading through those great promises of just the eighth chapter of Romans.

There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God works all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. All those who are justified will be glorified.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Those are great and wonderful and powerful promises that we need to cling on to. We need to hang on to in the midst of a chaotic world.

We need those promises. But Paul is well aware of the fact that the reality that he is surrounded by, the reality of the Gospel that he even preaches in some people's minds could cause them to doubt whether or not God is actually going to fulfill His promises.

Let's look at the beginning of Romans 9 quickly and we'll see why. Why is it that these great promises of Romans 8, and not just Romans 8, but the first eight chapters of Romans, why are they in danger if Paul does not say what he says here in these chapters?

[8 : 30] Look at the beginning of chapter 9. Paul begins, you know he's serious, you know he's on a serious note as he begins chapter 9. He says, I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit.

So what he's about to say is incredibly important. He wants to make sure that he's got his readers' attention. Pay attention, what I'm about to say to you is true, you need to hear this.

But then what he says is somewhat surprising. Because he goes on to say in verse 2, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

The cause of Paul's sorrow, the reason for his anguish, the reason that he's personally having inner turmoil, has to do with his fellow Jews, has to do with his kinsmen.

Notice what he says next. He says, I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

[9 : 29] And so the problem as Paul sees it is he looks around and he acknowledges that he's been traveling all over the Roman world. He's been preaching the gospel in city after city, in town after town, and in every town that he's gone to, he has set foot in the synagogue, in the local meeting place for the Jewish people.

And yet routinely, he has been run out of the synagogue by the Jewish people. His own people have not only rejected him, they have rejected the gospel. They have rejected the Messiah to whom the entire Old Testament points.

They have rejected their only hope. Paul recognizes that. What he's saying here is, my Jewish brothers and sisters are lost. They themselves are accursed.

They are cut off from Christ. And I could wish that I could take their place, but I can't take their place. And so I'm in anguish. Move down to chapter 10, the beginning of that chapter.

You can see the same thing. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them. That's his Jewish brothers and sisters. My prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

[10 : 34] So they're not saved. His fellow Jews who have rejected Jesus are not saved. We'll consider what that means for us next week, but we should at least acknowledge this morning that we are in a world that is full of lost people.

If Paul can look at his Jewish kinsmen around him and say, they're lost. They're cut off from Christ. They're accursed. They need to be saved. How much more ought we to be able to look at the world around us and see all those who have rejected Christ, they are accursed.

They are cut off. They need the gospel desperately. Paul is looking out upon a world that is full of lost people. He's looking out upon his own kinsmen, most of whom are lost.

But that reality is what creates the problem. That reality is what for Paul and it should for us as we're thinking and reading through the Scriptures, it should create a problem for us.

Because do we not have 39 books in the Old Testament full of promises made to the people of Israel? Do we not have two-thirds of our Bible devoted to recounting the history of God's dealings with the descendants of Abraham?

[11 : 47] And do we not have in that account multiple promises made to them throughout the centuries beginning with promises made to Abraham pertaining to his descendants, passed on to his descendants, reiterated to his descendants?

Do we not have promises made to King David and King David's descendants and those over whom David rules? I mean, we have two-thirds of our Bible that is replete with promises made to the people of Israel.

Paul knows that. He himself was a Pharisee. He's trained in the law of God and yet now he's facing the reality as he travels the world that the vast majority of the Jewish people, those who could say that they are Israelites, they are lost.

The promises of God are not being fulfilled for them as individuals. That creates a real problem. If you have a handful of promises on your right hand and a handful of promises on your left and you see that the promises that lie on your right hand appear to not have been fulfilled, what confidence would you have in the promises on your left?

You would have none. If indeed God's promises made to Israel have failed, if indeed God's word to them is not true, we have no reason to be confident that the promises made to us will be true.

[13 : 13] So this is huge. This is a big issue. Notice how Paul words it. He says in verse 6, he doesn't ask a question, he just phrases it as a statement, but you can sort of hear the question bristling behind it.

Verse 6, it is not as though the word of God has failed. He lists all these privileges in the first five verses that Israel has, that the descendants of Abraham have, which brings up the issue if they have all of these great privileges and yet they are not saved, what does that mean?

And Paul says, but even though that's true, the word of God has not failed. Or if you glance down to chapter 11, verse 1, Paul asks it in a form of a question.

I ask, he says then, has God rejected His people? Because if He's rejected His people, then He's not fulfilled His promises.

And that's a problem, not just for Paul, that's a problem for you and me. There are many times that you will doubt God's promises. And there are sometimes in your life, you will see things that seem like legitimate reasons to question and wonder whether or not God's word really is true.

[14 : 23] And that's what Paul is dealing with in these chapters. Yes, there's a lot of dense theological stuff in here. Yes, there are some difficult doctrines contained in these passages. There are some really hard verses and paragraphs that we'll have to work through to try to figure out together.

That's true. But what really is at stake here is not our untangling of all those interpretive nods. It's not our figuring out every detail of the text. What's really at stake in these chapters is whether or not God is true.

Whether or not His word can be counted on. Whether or not His promises will ultimately mean anything for you and me. And we want them to mean something to us. So we need to see Paul's answer.

Just the bird's eye view of his answer. And the bird's eye view of his answer is that God's promises to Israel have not failed because God is faithfully saving Israel.

God is faithfully redeeming His covenant people. How does that work out? Notice, we'll just look briefly at a few passages, a few verses. The second half of verse 6 continues with Paul saying the word of God has not failed by showing us how it has not failed.

[15 : 34] Notice he says, For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel and not all who are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. In other words, Paul's answer to this question, if the Jews have rejected the Messiah and are lost, does that mean that God's promises to Israel have failed?

His answer is no. Because not everyone who is a descendant of Abraham physically actually belongs to Israel. Not everybody who is a part of the nation of Israel belongs to spiritual Israel.

Paul is making a distinction here between those who can outwardly identify themselves as descendants of Abraham and those who are the true children of Abraham, the true children of the promise.

And he will go on to give example after example. He will show how it was Isaac, not Ishmael. Abraham had two sons. Ishmael was not saved.

Ishmael did not receive the promises. So Paul says, you see at the very beginning right after, one generation after the promises are made to Abraham, you see that not all of Abraham's descendants receive the promises.

[16 : 40] And then he moves on to the next generation. And he says, look at Jacob and Esau. Jacob received the promise. Esau did not receive the promise. And they were twins. So not everybody who is a physical descendant of Abraham was intended by God to be a recipient of the promises that God made to Abraham and his descendants.

In fact, the Old Testament term for this concept is that of the remnant. The idea that within the outward physical nation of Israel throughout the Old Testament, there is always within that nation a chosen remnant, a faithful few who believe the Word of God and remain faithful to God no matter how badly things get, no matter how much the nation as a whole may run after idols and do all sorts of crazy things, there's always in the midst of that a faithful few.

There's always the remnant. And Paul says, it's those people. It's the remnant for whom the promise was intended. Not everybody. Look, you can see the language in a few places. We won't look at it everywhere, but you can see it here and there.

chapter 9, verse 27. Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.

You hear an echo even in that quote from Isaiah, you hear an echo of the promise made to Abraham about the number of his descendants. And yet, he says, even though the number be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved.

[18 : 12] Only a remnant. And then remember Paul's question in chapter 11, verse 1. He says, I ask then, has God rejected his people? Listen to his answer. His answer is, by no means, and here's why.

For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. In other words, he hasn't rejected his people because I'm one of the descendants of Abraham and I've trusted in the Messiah.

I'm among the remnant. Move down to verse 5. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

So the key here, the key to increase confidence in the promises of God is to rightly understand those promises. Paul's not making these things up.

Paul's not coming up with some sort of contrived answer just so that he can maintain the things that he's been preaching all around the world. No, Paul threw out this argument in these chapters over and over and over.

[19 : 12] He's quoting from the Old Testament at least 10 times in chapter 9, at least 9 times in chapter 10, more than 25 times in these three chapters does he quote from the Old Testament.

And I couldn't even count the number of times that he just paraphrases or uses similar wording to the Old Testament. These three chapters are loaded down with Old Testament proof of what Paul is saying.

So what Paul is doing is he's saying, look, I know that it seems on the surface that God's word has failed because the vast majority of the Jewish people have rejected the Messiah. But look more closely at the promises themselves.

He's not offering a reinterpretation. He's looking at the Old Testament. He's saying, look, the word of God itself shows us that that promise was not intended to cover every physical descendant of Abraham.

It was intended for the remnant. It was intended for those chosen few. It was intended, Paul says, for the elect. That's who the promise was for, not for every single ethnic Jew.

[20 : 17] So now Paul has said, even though it appears to some that the word of God has failed, if you rightly understand the promises, then you'll know that his promises are in fact being fulfilled.

And as an example, he says, look at me. I am a Jew. I am of the remnant. And there are others like me throughout the world who have trusted in the Messiah.

The key to understand, to being more confident in God's promises is actually to understand God's promises. That's why we took so long to get through chapter 8.

We took probably twice as long to do chapter 8 as we have any other chapter in Romans. And it's not just because chapter 8 is so good. It's because there are so many promises in there and we need to make sure that we understand the promises.

What if you assumed that God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes? What if you misinterpreted that promise to mean that for every Christian God's going to make everything good.

[21 : 16] It's all going to be good. Well, what are you going to do when you get cancer? What are you going to do when your spouse dies? Are you going to disbelieve the promise? You will if you misinterpret the promise.

But if you take your time and you look at what the promise means, you'll know, no, this is what the promise said. The promise said these things would happen. But even these things, even cancer, even death, God will work for the good of those who belong to Him.

So you must rightly understand the promises. This is why we have to be a people of the book. Not just because I like to teach and I like to be wordy on Sunday mornings. This is why we have to take our time and work through it because if we misunderstand the promises, we will doubt the promises, we will fall into unbelief.

We have to understand the promises, Paul says. You have to look at the scriptures themselves and that's what he does over and over and over throughout these three chapters. It appears as though the Jewish people have been rejected and God's promises have failed, but they haven't.

The remnant continues to be saved. God's promises continue to be upheld. All those elect within the descendants of Abraham are indeed saved. That's what Paul says. But that's really only half the problem because the other half of the problem is yes, God made all these promises to the descendants of Abraham.

[22 : 33] Okay, we understand it's only a remnant and not every single person, but come on, Paul. More is happening when you go to city after city. You're not just being rejected by the Jews.

Your message is being received by the Gentiles in droves. I mean, the Gentiles are believing the vast majority of the church by the time Paul's writing Romans. The vast majority of the church is Gentile.

He's writing to a church in Rome that has some Jewish believers in it, but most of them are in fact Gentiles. So there's a two-fold problem here. Not just the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, but also the reception of the Messiah by the Gentiles.

What do you do with that, Paul? How do you answer that question? Because God made those promises to the descendants of Abraham, not to the Gentiles. So what in the world is happening here?

And the second half of the answer is once again to understand the nature of God's promises. In fact, Paul will repeatedly throughout these chapters, particularly in chapter 10, he will draw our attention to the reality that God is not saving the Gentiles in a way that's different from the way that He saved Abraham or David or anyone else in the Old Covenant era.

[23 : 51] God is not justifying declaring righteous the Gentiles on some basis other than the way that the Jews can be justified.

Paul's argument here is that always, always, justification has been by faith and faith alone. And always, always, those who trust in God's promises, be they Jew or Gentile, they are saved, they are delivered, they are rescued.

Paul says, that's the way it's always been. The privilege of Israel is that they've had possession of the gospel in the word of God. The privilege of the Jews is not that no one else will ever believe in this gospel, it's that they have it.

In fact, the promises made to Abraham is that through his descendants all the nations would be blessed. How? As they proclaim the gospel promises, even those outside the family of Abraham could be blessed by believing in the gospel promises.

Just look at a couple places here in chapter 10 and then we'll move on from this. Verse 9. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[25 : 01] That's fairly simple. That's fairly straightforward. You must believe, you must confess, you will be saved. Verse 10. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For the scripture says, everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. Everyone who believes in him, the scripture says, will not be put to shame. Notice next.

Look closely. They'll not be put to shame for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. Not in this field of play. When it comes to the issue of how a person gets right with God, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Is there a historical distinction to be made? Yes, there is. Are there other distinctions that we can make? Yes, there are. But is there a difference in the way of salvation for Jews as opposed to Gentiles?

No, Paul says. Everyone who trusts, everyone who believes, receives the gift of God's righteousness and is saved. And there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile on this issue.

[26 : 08] So, Paul says, if you think that the reception of the gospel by the Gentiles somehow invalidates all that God said to the Jews during the Old Covenant era, then you've misunderstood what He said to them because He was always saying to them, you must trust in Me.

He gave them the law so that they would learn that they could not do it in any other way. He justified Abraham on the basis of faith alone. It has always been this way and it has always been the case that the mission of the Jewish people was to be missionary, to take the promises made to them and proclaim them to the world so that all the nations might be blessed through the faith of Abraham.

That was always the case, Paul says. So, nothing that Paul sees in his ministry, not the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, not the accepting of the Messiah by the Gentiles, none of those things call into question God's promises.

If you understand his promises rightly, and his promises are clear, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And I wonder this morning, I wonder how many, like the Jews of Paul's day, so many Jews, he says in chapter 10, verse 2, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

So they're not saved. I wonder how many church people there are. How many people there are who go through all the motions who would have more in common with the Jews over whom Paul is in anguish than they would with the Gentiles who have trusted and believed.

[27 : 49] Because outwardly, there is a kind of zeal for God. Outwardly, there is an excitement over church stuff, and there is involvement in attending Bible studies and being involved in different sorts of ministries.

And yet, it never really and truly called upon the name of the Lord. The Apostle Paul would say simply, stop. Stop and acknowledge that the only means by which you can be saved and delivered and rescued is by faith alone.

Stop thinking that all the things that you are doing for God will actually count before God on Judgment Day. And remember that it is those who call upon Him who are saved.

And call upon Him! Stop putting it off! Stop thinking! It will be terribly embarrassing if my church realizes that all these years I've never really been saved. Stop thinking like that!

Who cares about your shame now? You want to never be put to shame before God because you've trusted in His Son. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. It doesn't matter what anybody else's opinion is. What matters is that you call upon the Lord and you are saved by faith in Jesus.

[28 : 59] Do not be like so many of the Jews of Paul's day and outwardly have a zeal for God and yet reject the only means of being right with God. Trust in Christ, not in your own churchiness.

Not in your own Christianity. Trust in Him. Trust, Paul says. I would say if we could sum up the theme of most of chapter 10, I would say it's really simple.

Trust in Jesus because those who do not, those who try to earn God's favor, they are the ones who fall under the curse and it's only those who believe in Christ and in Christ alone who are in the end actually really saved.

Call upon the name of the Lord and recognize. I think this is something that we need to settle in our own hearts. We need to recognize that there are around us in our families, among our co-workers and people that we see here and there, there are lost people all around us who do not know that they are lost.

There are lost people all around us who maybe it's their church attendance or maybe they don't go to church but it's the way that they help their neighbors or the way that they work hard at work and they have all of these reasons that they think are reasons for them to be confident in their eternity.

[30 : 20] And yet, the truth is, they need to hear the gospel message. Stop trusting in your own righteousness and believe. We, like Paul, are surrounded by lostness.

We, like Paul, have great gospel promises to deliver to those who are in fact lost. And we, like Paul, can be fully confident that all those who are called, that all of the elect, when they hear this gospel word, they will respond.

We can have the same kind of confidence that the Apostle Paul has. So there's a problem that Paul has to address in these chapters of Jewish lostness and of Gentile inclusion.

There is a solution of rightly understanding the promises themselves. And then there is a reality that our world is not all that much different from Paul's. It's really not.

We're surrounded by lostness. We have great promises that have been misunderstood by many. We have a great gospel and we can have great confidence that God will save all who call upon Him.

[31 : 30] One last thing to point out in this passage and then we'll be done. And that is that Paul says that ultimately at the end of this, God is sovereignly working all of these things toward a specific end.

He says, and it's kind of a complicated argument that we'll have to spend some time breaking down later, but he says, consider this. Consider that God gave promises to the Jewish people and they rejected the promises, but the Gentiles have received the promises.

Now consider, he says, that the very ones who rejected the promises will see those who have received the promises. They will see them grafted in, Paul says. That's the language he uses.

Grafted in. They will see them and they will grow jealous of the great blessings they have in the truth. And many of those, the remnant among the Jewish people, will out of their jealousy for the gospel, jealousy to be united to the Messiah by faith.

They will, by seeing these Gentiles trust, they will themselves in turn entrust. Which, Paul says, this is God's plan. This is what God is doing.

[32 : 43] God is in the business of working out a sovereign plan for all of history so that He might save all who belong to Him. God is providentially guiding all of history and all of our lives to fulfill His great promises.

Far from the promises being called into question because of the reality that we see around us, Paul says, it's that reality itself that should increase our confidence and should cause us to know that all that God promised, He is in fact doing.

And if that's true, our only response to those realities should be praise, should be to fall on our knees and worship a God who is sovereign and who providentially guides things.

That's what Paul does at the end of chapter 11. He has all this dense theological material and it's not for nothing. It's not just so that he can have a theological conversation. It's not for all that.

It's for the sake of worship because he explodes in verse 33. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. Have you ever just been overwhelmed by the depth of God's knowledge?

[33 : 54] Have you been overwhelmed by the depth of the truth of His Word? How unsearchable are His judgments? How inscrutable His ways? They are beyond our understanding.

That's not a reason to grow frustrated with God. That's a reason to fall on your knees before Him. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been His counselor? Who has ever given a gift to Him so that He might be repaid?

Nobody. God doesn't receive gifts. He gives gifts. He is the sovereign one. He is in control. He is doing all these things. And so because of that, from Him and through Him and to Him are all things and to Him be glory forever.

Let's pray.