



***1** 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. **2** 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? **3** “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” **4** But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” **5** So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. **6** But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

***7** What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, **8** 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.” (Deut. 29:4)*

***9** And David says,*

*“Let their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs forever.” (Psalm 69:22-23)*

***11** 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.*

I have never been much of a salesman. My main experience was selling shoes in the mall during my last year of college. Selling shoes was not that hard and when you include commissions, I definitely made more money than your average job. But I wasn't very good at suggestive selling items like purses and shoe polish. I would have made a much higher commission on those items

but I could not convince myself that I was a good authority of what kind and color of purse the ladies should be buying. I mean, can you really blame me? ;-)

My other sales experience happened when Ryan and I attempted to start an Ebay business when Ryan was ten years old. I had played a fun game that some call ladder golf. You might know the one I am talking about, where you throw gold balls tied to a string onto a "ladder" made of PVC. So together, we made ten sets of these. The plan was not to make much money but to teach Ryan business principles while working on this project together. I made our own logo, created a set of instructions and placed all ten sets on Ebay. Within the first few hours, I had already sold one set so I thought this business thing might take off. But within 24 hours I received a cease



and desist order from the owner of the ladder golf patent. Our business was finished just that quickly.

So, I don't have much of a track record as a salesman. But that's not going to stop me from pitching this new idea to all of you. Here's the deal. I want to tell you about an amazing business opportunity and then you decide if you'd like to get involved with me or not. In some ways you could call multi-level marketing but that will all be clear in a moment. The most important thing you need to understand is that the business cannot fail. It just can't. Does that sound too good to be true? Just hang on and let me finish. The business cannot fail. It is guaranteed. However, while you are working on it, it will look like utter failure. Your customer base will be next to nothing. Your sales will be minimal. Maybe a little better than my Sling Golf adventure, but not much better. Now here's the weird part. You don't actually have to do anything. It is highly recommended that you do get engaged in the business, but it will just go on without you. Oh, and if you do actually get involved, it will be hard work, often very frightening and some have even died trying. So, how does all of that sound? Guaranteed success, though it looks like utter failure, you can work or not work and you might die. Who wants to join with me? Anyone?

So what am I talking about? What I have just described for you is the Master's Plan for worldwide evangelism, or as the apostle Paul calls it, gospel proclamation. Let me show you how it measures up the business plan I just presented. And remember, this is the Master's Plan, not ours.

1. Guaranteed success-As we saw last week, we know that the Master's Plan will be successful. There will be representatives from every tribe, nation, people and language throughout the world. This is a definite promise that will come to pass.

2. It looks like utter failure-In Romans 10:21, Paul wrote. *But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."* The entire record of the Old

Testament is one of God reaching out to his people only to have them reject the Lord's offers. They are disobedient and contrary.

In Matthew, Jesus made this statement about the Jewish people.

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar (Matthew 23:34-35).

Do you see how Jesus placed bookends on either side of the Old Testament? Abel in Genesis to the end of the Old Testament. All throughout their history, the Jews murdered nearly every prophet sent to them. Therefore, the Master's Plan of global evangelism looks like utter failure.

Moreover, Paul's question at the beginning of chapter 11 adds to this appearance of failure. *I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!* Do you know why Paul even asked this question? Why would he even verbalize such a potentially blasphemous question as this? He asked the question because from all appearances, it looks as if that might be true. Israel had always rejected the Lord, from Abel to Zechariah, from Genesis to Malachi. They are disobedient and contrary people. If you were measuring this like you would a business, it would look awful.

Most of you had probably heard of Wiscopop, made right here in little ol' Viroqua. What if Wiscopop said, "Ya know what. We're tiny, but were gonna take on the bib player and take them down. Within ten years, we will knock Coke as the number one soft drink maker. So what if they have 42% of the world's \$290 billion soft drink market and we only have .000000000001 % of the market. Our product is better and we're gonna take them down." That would certainly be good for the economy of Viroqua, don't you think. Now what if in ten years time their market share moved from .000000000001 % all the way up to .000000000002%. Would you consider that a success? No, you'd have to fire the owner for miserably failing to meet their goal. From all appearances, it would be utter failure.

From the perspective of the Jews, it looks like the gospel has utterly failed. There was a immediate multiplication of the gospel in the early church, but Paul quickly ran into a brick wall in his evangelistic efforts with the Jews. In fact, it was so bad that he stopped witnessing to them and instead turned all of his attention to the Gentiles. And how does that look today? Almost 2000 years later, the gospel has not advanced much further into Jewish territory. It looks like utter failure. Much of the world looks the same. There are so many nations which are officially closed to the gospel and brutally heavy in persecuting the tiny minority of those who *do* follow Christ. It looks like utter failure.

3. You can work or not work. Here is the final comparison to my fictional business. In the global spread of the gospel by the master's Plan, you don't ever have to actually share the gospel with anyone. God doesn't need you to do his work. Now obviously he does need some people and by his grace and will, they will do the work of the gospel. But when it comes down to individuals, God doesn't need us. His Master Plan will come to pass with or without us. He doesn't need us to

share, but he does want us to share the gospel. He wants us because he knows it is better for us if we do. Christian service is rarely easy but it's always rewarding.

So *has* God rejected his people? It would appear so but the Master's Plan is infinitely greater than our short-sighted vision. Paul proceeded to give several bits of evidence showing that God had not rejected his people.

1. Paul was a Jew. *By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.* God could not have rejected his people since Paul was "Exhibit A" on display. "Here I am," Paul was saying. "Look at me. I am more of a Jew than any other Jew." Do you recall Paul's Jewish pedigree that he listed in Philippians chapter three?

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless (Philippians 3:4-6). Paul's was a Jew's Jew. Every cell in his body was infused with Jewishness. He breathed Jewish air. He thought Jewish thoughts. By birth, by training and by daily discipline he was a Jew. yet he was also a born again believer in Jesus Christ. He was saying to his readers, "I am living proof that God has not rejected his people." Paul realized that he was just one guy and this is not the only reason he gave, but you have to admit, he was a really important person.

2. The Jews are God's chosen people. Paul gave this piece of evidence in verse two. *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.* Now before we go further, let's make sure we understand what he meant by "his people." How are the Israelites so often referred to in the Old Testament, as God's what? God's chosen people. But what does that mean? In what sense are they 'chosen' if they are missing out on salvation through faith in Christ? For what were the Jews chosen then?

We need to see two types of election in Scripture. The category of people called "His people" in this chapter we are dealing with the general "election." The Jews were chosen by God to receive special blessings. Paul laid down a pretty good list of these in chapter 9.

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen (Romans 9:4-5).

This is what it means to be God's chosen people. This is what it means to be an elect nation. They had blessings far beyond what the Gentiles were given, chief of which is to have Jesus Christ as one of their own. So we could say that this is an election which brings blessings. And the word *election* simply means *to choose*.

This would be very similar to what we call common grace. Every person, whether believer or unbeliever, experiences common grace. When you walk outside on a gorgeous Fall day and soak in the colors and crisp air, that is common grace. When you experience the miracle of a child being born and are allowed the privilege of raising him or her-and all of your children if God allows you more than one, that's common grace. When you get right down to it, every breath that

we take and every moment we are permitted to live is nothing but pure common grace. Now it is obvious that some people experience *more* common grace than others. For a wide variety of reasons, the wealth and joys of this world are not evenly distributed. Some of that comes from sinful oppression of the poor and downcast but whatever the earthly cause may be, God is sovereignly distributing different amounts of common grace to all people.

So the same holds true for Israel being God's chosen people. Gentiles were not given these extra blessings. God chose to give them only to the Israelites. But this choosing of his people does not mean that every last person will be saved. There is a general election which brings blessing and another kind of election that leads to personal salvation.

And don't forget the context here. From Paul's perspective in the middle of the first century, it could easily have appeared as if God had rejected his people, which again, is why he asked the question in the first place.

3. The remnant in Elijah's day. This is the third set of evidence that Paul presented to show that God had not rejected his people. I love the way Paul began this argument. *Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?* Do you see what he was saying here? He was saying, "Don't you know your Bible stories? Don't you now this most famous story about the prophet Elijah?" It's kind of like a mild scolding. It's kind of like him saying, "Just when *was* the last time you read your Bible anyway?"

But these people did not own a Bible did they? Johannes Gutenberg and his printing press were fourteen centuries in the future. No one owned a Bible-what we call an Old Testament. So how would the average believer in Rome have known about this Elijah story? Only the Jewish Synagogues would have had Old Testament scrolls and even then, each synagogue almost certainly did not have the complete Old Testament.

But what about the Gentile Christians. How would they have heard these stories? Here's a little glimpse of the habits of the early church. *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers* (Acts 2:42). So they taught one another these stories and like Deuteronomy 6 states, they would have also "taught them diligently to their children, and talked of them when they sat in their homes, and when they walked by the way, and when they lied down, and when they rose."

Not one person had a Bible yet Paul expected that they would know these stories. Now you could argue that this Elijah story was very well known and that would have been more likely that the average believer would know this story, but that's not true of the hundreds of other times that Paul quotes from the Old Testament. So what I am saying is that there was this overall expectation that the typical Christian would know the Old Testament and know it fairly well, and all of that without a Bible!

Catch this verse from Romans 15. *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* (Rom. 15.4) *Whatever* was written means *everything* that was written. Can you see the significance of this? The entire Old Testament was written for our instruction. And what was

the point of this instruction? *that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* Do you lack hope? Do you lack endurance and encouragement? If you do, then this verse is telling us that at least part of the reason you lack these things is because you have no appetite for the word of God.

Jim Boisen's mom, Rose, became a Christian in the last two years or so. She had one of those slow conversions where you can't point out the exact moment she was saved but she is clearly saved nonetheless. Rose was hoping to get baptized at our service in August but it didn't work out. Apparently she has never been a strong reader but Rose does have a voracious appetite for the Scriptures. Jim got her an audio Bible and he told me that she falls to sleep every night listening to the Bible and then when she wakes she starts again where she left off. Isn't that cool?

Here's what you can do after the service. Go up to Jim and ask him this question. "Does your mom have hope? Does she have more hope today than she did two years ago?" What do you think he will say? Understand that his mom is not in the best of health. She is mostly wheelchair bound, doesn't get out of the house very often and is in her declining years. But she has hope! She has hope and endurance and encouragement from the Scriptures. Do you have that?

Now I am not saying that reading your Bible is like taking a magical pill. You've got to have some understanding of what you are reading and most importantly, you've got to act in obedience to what you are reading and understanding. I would go so far as to say that if you are reading but not understanding and obeying, you just might be worse off than if you didn't read at all. Now don't get all cynical on me and think, "Well then it's a good thing I'm not reading my Bible!" That wouldn't be too bright, would it?

So we need to read the Bible for understanding and obedience. And this verse from Romans tells us that all Scripture was written so we might have hope. Don't just read your Bible because the pastor says it's a good idea. Don't read your Bible because you think God will be happier if you do. Read your Bible so that you might have hope and that your hope would be in Christ.

So you and I need to know what happened with this Elijah story, and most of us probably do. The context was the big showdown between Elijah and the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. It was an epic battle between Yahweh and the false gods. Despite being drenched in water, Elijah's sacrifice was burned by holy fire from the Lord and the people killed all of the false prophets. From all appearances, it looked like the single greatest victory in prophetic history. I mean, this story is unparalleled. But following the victory he ran for his life. he spent a night in the wilderness, then he ran for forty days and forty nights straight, an amazing miracle in itself. Then Elijah hid in a cave and told the Lord, "*I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away*" (1 Kings 19:10).

What looked like a total victory turned into a defeat for Elijah. But then what looked like defeat turned into a promise of hope. "*I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.*" Seven thousand. Not just Elijah but seven thousand others.

Does it ever feel to you like God has rejected his people? I know that theologically and Biblically, you probably wouldn't say that. It just sounds wrong to say that. Maybe you don't believe that God has rejected his people but maybe you think he has rejected you? Maybe it feels like he just plain forgot about you.

Has God rejected you or forgotten about you? Appearances can be deceiving, can't they? In Elijah's day and in Paul's day it did almost look as if God had rejected his people. The Master's Plan. He has a plan for global proclamation of the gospel, which as we will see later in this chapter, most definitely includes the Jews.

And the Master has a plan for you.

Who knows your deepest fears? It's not your husband or your wife, as loving as they may be. But Christ knows. Who knows the specific areas in your heart and mind where you lack hope? It's not your buddy at work or your mom or dad, as kind and caring as they may be. But Christ knows.

Christ wants to inject hope into your hopelessness. Will you let him? Do you trust him? Will you pursue him through obedience to His word?

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