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Sermon Notes

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God Has Not Rejected the Jews

Romans 11:1-6

Introduction: A People with every reason to be extinct... and yet they live!

Romans 9-11: Paul deals with the perplexing problem of the Jewish peoples' almost universal rejection of Christ as their King and Messiah

The Jews are a truly astonishing and remarkable people in so many ways

- They make up a vanishingly small percentage of the world's population, but have a remarkably powerful effect on the flow of history
- An amazing percentage of Fortune 500 Companies are run by Jewish people
- A remarkably high percentage of graduates from Harvard and Yale and other high levels of education are Jews
- A high percentage of PhDs are Jews
- So also an amazingly striking percentage of Nobel prize winners are Jewish
- Most Presidents desire that their cabinet members represent as wide a swath of the American populace as possible... but almost always a good number of high level cabinet posts and also high levels of diplomatic agencies are held by this amazing people
- BUT one of the most amazing things about the Jews is that they still exist as a nation!!!

The Jews were constituted as a people when a wandering Aramean named Abram, an elderly man with a barren wife and no children, was called to follow the voice of an unseen God

Years later, this still childless man, now named Abraham, was promised that he would have descendents as numerous as the stars and as countless as the sand

The descendents of Abraham still exist today, against all odds... they are the Jews

AS DO WE GENTILE SINNERS, spiritually speaking, the Jews have every reason to be extinct! By their repeated sins against the Laws of God, they have kindled His anger. By their repeated persecution of God's servants, the prophets, they have kindled his rage. And worst of all, by their national rejection of their messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, they have kindled God's wrath. Spiritually speaking, God had every reason and right to remove them from the face of the earth

BUT HE HAS NOT, nor will He!!

- a. God has the power to do it
- b. Other tribes and nations have become extinct

The Seven Tribes that Israel expelled in the Bible... where are they today?

Deuteronomy 7:1 Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites

Many American Indian tribes have become extinct... James Fenimore Cooper wrote a whole book on this called *The Last of the Mohicans*... the Mohicans were a tribe of Native Americans in the Northeastern portion of our country... but they became extinct around the time of the French and Indian war... SO tribes of peoples can become extinct

But the Jews, despite repeated crusades, Inquisitions, pogroms and genocides and holocausts still remain as a people... neither assimilated into Gentile cultures nor extinct... they still remain! Why?

Romans 11 gives the stunning answer: God is not through with Israel yet! They are still, in a mysterious and prophetic sense, "His people, the people of God."

II. Paul's Assertion: God Has Not Rejected the Jews

Romans 11:1-6 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means!

A. A Profound Question: "God Has Not Rejected the Jews, Has He?"

1. Question asked assuming the answer "No!"
2. It follows based on the final verse of chapter 10

Romans 10:21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Paul links it with the word "Therefore..." or "Then..." (NIV)

Therefore, I ask: Did God reject his people?

B. Grounds for the Rejection Abound

1. God's consistent assessment of Israel

a. At Mt. Sinai, the Golden Calf

Exodus 32:9-10 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

b. Moses, forty years later, in Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 9:6-8 Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. ⁷ Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD. ⁸ At Horeb you aroused the LORD's wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you.

c. Isaiah called them as rebellious as Sodom and Gomorrah

d. Jeremiah was commanded not even to pray for them that the exile would not take place

e. Daniel poured out his heart in confession of Israel's national sins

f. Nehemiah, after all Israel's history through the exile to Babylon

Nehemiah 9:29-30 You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. ³⁰ For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention

g. And Ezra, after the exile to Babylon, after Israel had lost everything to sin, because of their continual rebellion against God's laws... Ezra found out that some Israelites had again defied the Lord and broken His commandments concerning intermarriage with pagans, Ezra poured out his heart in weeping and grief about Israel's astonishing stubbornness

2. Christ Himself told the parable of the Vineyard and the tenant farmers to show Israel's consistent rebellion against God and His servants the prophets:

Christ's seven-fold woe on the Scribes and Pharisees culminated in a devastating judgment on all Israel

Matthew 23:29-37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

3. Stephen's recounting of Israel's history
 - a. One of the most brilliant sermons in history
 - b. Subtly and carefully proved that throughout history, the Jews had always rejected the very ones that God had sent to help them
 - i) They rejected Joseph, and God raised Joseph up to save his rebellious brothers from the famine
 - ii) They rejected Moses before he fled to the desert, and God raised Moses up to save his rebellious people
 - iii) They rejected Moses again after he had led Israel out of Egypt, and wanted to go back to Egypt
 - c. The sermon culminated with this powerful denunciation

Acts 7:51-52 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him

4. Israel's constant pattern of rejection of the messengers has now culminated in the most heinous sin of their history: killing their King and Messiah
5. All of this was ample ground for God to reject the Jews forever and erase them into the oblivion of history
 - a. God has power to do it
 - b. God has obliterated other nations
 - c. BUT the Jews continue!!
 - d. Why? That is the purpose of Romans 11

C. Paul's Clear Assertion: May It Never Be!

1. God absolutely has NOT rejected his people

Romans 11:1-2 By no means! ... God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

2. Strong expression of total denial, as though the very concept were repugnant

3. “May it NEVER be!” (KJV): “God forbid!!”
4. God has not and will not abandon the Jews

III. First Proof: God Is Still Saving Jews

A. Paul’s Life and Calling are Evidence

Romans 11:1 I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

1. Paul, for the third time in Romans 9-11 identifies himself body and soul with the Jews
2. Paul IS STILL JEWISH as well as CHRISTIAN
 - a. He is not a Greek convert to Judaism
 - b. His Jewish ancestral roots were a source of immense pride to himself in his earlier days

Philippians 3:5 ...circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee

Galatians 1:14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

- c. No one could refute the genuineness of his Jewish credentials
3. All the early Christians were also Jews
 - a. Upper room after the Resurrection: all Jewish
 - b. Pentecost: 3000 converts to Christ... all Jewish
 - c. After Peter & John healed the lame beggar, the number of Christian men grew to 5000... all Jewish
 - d. After the selection of the early deacons, a large number of priests became obedient to the faith
 - e. Paul’s constant efforts toward the Jews consistently produced SOME Jewish believers in Christ

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 17:10-12 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

4. The Church grew from a Jewish “olive tree”... and many of Paul’s disciples were Jews

B. Paul’s Primary Point: Every Jewish Convert to Christ is Evidence

1. Paul understands conversion to Christ as a supernatural act of Almighty God
2. No one can become a Christian without God’s supernatural work in their souls
3. If God had rejected the Jews as a nation, not one of them would be Christians

C. Paul’s Secondary Point: His Astonishing Conversion and God’s Sovereign Grace

1. Paul wasn’t just any Jew and his lifestyle not that of ordinary Jewish commitment
2. Yet God called him not only to be a Christian BUT ALSO the apostle to the Gentiles
3. Common logic would say a Gentile would be a better apostle to the Gentiles than a Jew would...
4. But God in His astonishing wisdom chose a “Hebrew of Hebrews” who spent his earlier days crushing Christianity, who was “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” to be “**THE Apostle to the Gentiles**”
5. If God were through with the Jews, if He had rejected them as a nation, then why use such a Jewish man as Paul to reach them?

D. So Also Today: Many Jewish Christians

1. God continues to reach some Jews with the Gospel

Messianic Jews, who hold that it is possible to believe in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah and at the same time maintain a Jewish identity. They see themselves as fulfilled Jews who have no need to identify with a Gentile church. In a recent study the Jewish Rabbi, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, has estimated that worldwide there are as many as 250,000 Messianic Jews

2. Remarkable history of God’s continuing work among Jews

In the nineteenth century, a Russian Jew of great learning named **Joseph Rabinowitz** was sent to Palestine by the Jews to buy land for them. He went to Jerusalem. One day he went

up on the Mount of Olives to rest. Someone had told him to take a New Testament as the best guidebook about Jerusalem. The Christ he had known was the Christ of the Greek and Roman churches, who were the persecutors of his people. But as he read the New Testament he became acquainted with the real Christ of whom the Old Testament Scriptures had foretold and his heart grew warm. He looked off toward Calvary and thought, *Why is it that my people are persecuted and cast out?* And conviction gave the answer, *It must be because we have put to death our Messiah.* He lifted up his eyes to that Messiah and said, "My Lord and my God." He came down from the mount a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He went home to Russia and erected a synagogue for the Jews, over the door of which was written these words:

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:36

He wrote many parables, including this one:

"Two foolish people were traveling in a four-wheeled wagon. Noticing that the wagon was moving heavily, they examined it and found that a wheel was missing. One of the foolish people sprang out and ran forward along the road, saying to every one he met, 'We have lost a wheel. Have you seen one?' At last a wise man said to him, 'You are looking in the wrong direction. You should seek your wheel behind the wagon, not in front of it.' This is the mistake that Jews have been making all of these centuries. The four wheels of Hebrew history are Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Jews have been looking into the future when they should have been looking into the past." He kept ties with many Christian denominations, but kept his congregation insulated from denominational controversies and maintained his Jewish identity

3. Jews for Jesus

Bottom line: the fact that many Jews, like Paul, do trust in Christ as their Messiah and Savior and Lord, is conclusive proof that God has not rejected His people

If God had forsaken the Jews, there would be none saved at all, since:

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

1 Corinthians 12:3 no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

IV. Second Proof: God's Foreknowledge and Faithfulness

vs. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

A. God's Faithfulness to His Promises

1. If God has forsaken Israel, then He has broken many promises He made to them
2. Paul is actually quoting Scripture here

1 Samuel 12:22 For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.

Samuel's farewell address to his people... despite their repeated sins, God is committed to Israel as His own people FOR THE SAME OF HIS GREAT NAME

God's reputation as a faithful, promise-keeping God is at stake with Israel

It has been that way from the beginning

Twice God threatened to Moses to destroy Israel because of their sins... because of the Golden Calf and because they refused to enter the Promised Land

Both times, Moses prayed based on God's name, God's glory, God's reputation among the nations

Jeremiah noted the same thing in his prayers for sinful Israel

Jeremiah 14:20-21 O LORD, we acknowledge our wickedness and the guilt of our fathers; we have indeed sinned against you. ²¹ For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it.

3. Paul here in Romans 11 is saying the same thing: God's name and faithfulness are wrapped up in His treatment of Israel

B. God's Foreknowledge of Israel

vs. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

1. Paul adds a little phrase: "whom He foreknew"
2. Paul refers here to the foreknowledge of God
3. Earlier, we saw this concept to refer to the election of individuals to salvation

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

4. Here, however, Paul is talking about God's stance toward the whole nation of Israel
5. Some commentators use this phrase to say that Paul is merely saying that God has not rejected the ELECT of Israel
6. However, the rest of the chapter has to do with the future of national Israel

7. Therefore, the foreknowledge here has to do with God's relationship to the whole nation of Israel... they are still "His people" in some sense corporately, though they are rejecting Christ
8. God will remain faithful to His promises even if they are not faithful

ESV Amos 3:2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

"Known" means in a covenant sense, like Adam "knew" Eve, and she became pregnant... it has to do with God's covenant with the nation of Israel

Malachi 3:6 "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."

God's unchangeable nature means that He will not destroy Israel, but He will leave a remnant to fulfill His ultimate purposes

V. Third Proof: God's Pattern of Sovereign Grace

A. The Case of Elijah

Romans 11:2-4 Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

1. Paul is dealing with the apostasy of Israel... their almost universal rejection of their Messiah
2. His mind traces back to an earlier time, when the nation of Israel was deep in apostasy... the days of wicked King Ahab, and his wicked foreign queen Jezebel... the days when God raised up a witness named Elijah
3. Elijah called for a drought and famine according to the curses in the Law of Moses
4. It was one of the lowest times in Israel's history... and Paul uses it as an example of how God does not forsake Israel during such times, but rather preserves for Himself and for His name's sake a remnant of Jews
5. Elijah is at the lowest part of his ministry
 - a. Wicked queen Jezebel has been leading the nation to worship the demon-god Baal

- b. They have been bending their knees, sacrificing their sons and daughters in the fire to Baal
 - c. They have called on the name of Baal and forgotten Yahweh
 - d. Jezebel murdered the true prophets, and had 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah sit at her table every night
6. Elijah cries out against his own people

Romans 11:3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?

- 7. It seemed that there would soon be no faithful Jews left, who had not bowed the knee to Baal
- 8. But even as great a prophet as Elijah was too focused on his own situation, on his own ministry, his own faithfulness, and his own situation
- 9. He forgot that it is GOD who makes believers, and God will not forsake His people into total unbelief

Application: Never underestimate what God is capable of doing or what God actually IS doing simply because you can't see it with your own eyes!!

God is constantly at work around the world, but much of His work is hidden from our eyes

B. Central Concept: A Remnant Chosen by Grace

- 1. Concept raised earlier

Romans 9:27-29 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. ²⁸ For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." ²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

- 2. Key idea: the Lord "left" a remnant, He "left for Himself" a seed in the land
- 3. Note the sovereign grace of God

Romans 11:4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

- a. "I have reserved FOR MYSELF seven thousand..."
- b. Not "It so happens that there are seven thousand..."
- c. Rather, this is the act of God's sovereign power and grace

- d. The remnant are His special possession, they are His own, His beloved, His cherished, His children
 - e. They exist because He created them, they still believe because He has chosen them
4. Paul's clear application concerning the Jews and Christ

Verse 5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

- a. Just as God had mysteriously reserved for himself 7000 Jews who refused on pain of their lives to bow the knee to Baal...at a time when the Jewish nation was almost universally rebelling against God
- b. SO ALSO there are Jewish Christians, precious possessions of God the father at a time in which most of the Jewish nation was rejecting Christ
- c. The existence of the remnant in both cases is attributed to the same thing: the SOVEREIGN GRACE OF ALMIGHTY GOD

C. Chosen by Grace, Not by Works

Romans 11:5-6 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

- 1. This is the same teaching as Romans 9
- 2. God does not choose based on foreseen actions or works or even foreseen faith
- 3. GRACE is contrasted with WORKS... and works represents anything the human being has to commend himself to God
 - a. There is nothing pleasing in the remnant that CAUSES the election
 - b. God isn't searching the human heart before the foundation of the world
 - c. He is searching His own sovereign counsel and will and purpose
 - d. For the sake of His name and for the sake of His glory, for His own possession there will always be Jewish Christians
 - e. Chosen by grace so that the remnant's existence will be GUARANTEED
- 4. Grace the OPPOSITE of works
 - a. If there is anything IN Paul or Peter or John or Joseph Rabinowitz or Felix Mendelssohn or Marvin Olasky or any of the other Jewish Christians

throughout history that CAUSED God to choose them, then IT WOULD NOT BE BY GRACE

- b. Grace means God's sovereign determination to call into existence what did not exist before, to cover rebellion and wickedness and to make a perfect and righteous people for His own glory

Question: If God chose the remnant by works, by something they had inside themselves, then is it not a system of MERIT, of REWARD? And if it is, what room, then, is there for grace?

God means to humble both Jew and Gentile believer alike, and so He instructs us that we are chosen only by grace

Why is this essential?

D. What Grace Means for the Future of Israel

1. Paul's teaching on unconditional election may be unsettling to us Americans
2. We revere independence and self-rule and autonomy
3. But God says He is the King, He is the Emperor of Salvation
4. It is BY GRACE we are saved, not by WORKS
5. Therefore, God can save Israel ANYTIME He chooses... it is not beyond Him
6. And, Romans 11 teaches us that Israel's rejection of Christ is temporary
7. Someday, the nation will turn and embrace Christ as a whole

Romans 11:25-27 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

8. I believe this will be at the end of the world
9. If it were not for God's sovereign control, how could this prophecy be true?
10. The doctrine of sovereign grace, of unconditional election, guarantees a glorious end to human history and to the history of Israel

VI. Application

A. Never Doubt That God is at Work—Whether You Can See It Or Not

Isaiah 45:15 Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

1. God wills to hide from us, especially OUR OWN fruitfulness
2. God hides our fruit so we will not become arrogant and bloated with self-importance
3. Sometimes that can result in discouragement... DON'T LET IT

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

4. Don't say with Elijah, "I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT..." No you're NOT!!!
5. God is always at His work to this very day, even if you don't see it

B. Be Humbled at God's Sovereign Grace

1. It is by grace alone that everyone is a Christian
2. Never forget this

1 Corinthians 15:10 by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

1 Corinthians 1:27-30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus

C. Be Active in Evangelizing Jews

1. Don't forget that individual Jews who die in unbelief go to hell
2. Remember Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem; Remember Paul's great sorrow
3. YET there is an elect hidden remnant of Jews, and SOME of them will believe

D. Be Hopeful About Israel's Future: Sovereign Grace Guarantees That It Is Bright

E. Rejoice in Jewish Christians

1. Get to know some Jewish believers in Jesus

2. They are some of the most delightful people you will ever meet!!