

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

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Has God thrown away His people Israel? Since Messiah has already come and completed the work of salvation and since so much of the world has already believed in Jesus has God then no use for Israel anymore and disposed of them. If you believe that then you believe that God simply uses people when it suits his purposes and when he is done throws them away. Apostle Paul teaches differently; Read on ...

Romans 11:7-10

7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." 9 And David says: " Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. 10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always."

Apostle Paul continues to make his case that only a remnant of Israel had believed the gospel at that time, he says it is God who has blinded them and he quotes Deuteronomy 29:4 wherein God says to Israel that He has not given them a spirit to understand and to obey. He also quotes Isaiah who says in Isaiah 29:10 that the Lord has given Israel a spirit of deep sleep. He also quotes King David who wrote in Psalm 69:23 that the Lord would give darken the eyes of Israel. This was the situation of the Jewish people in the days when this letter was written.

The situation in Israel and the Jewish people today is very similar there is a remnant of believers who are of faith and a majority who have the religion but not the living faith. The Jewish people of those days had a form of religion; they had a system that they followed trying to earn their righteousness but they did not have a living faith, trusting in the Lord for their righteousness.

Many Christians today are similar to the Jews of Apostle Paul's day, we may say the right things, sing the right songs, use the right vocabulary etc. but do we really have a living faith? A living faith is not one that is just displayed in church but lived out every day, with every decision that we make and the way we live our lives. I am not just talking about sin here but whether our lives display God's glory to the world. The book of James says that faith must be accompanied by action and without action faith is dead¹. We have to search our own hearts whether our faith is a kind of faith that people can see or whether it is only lip service.

Romans 11:11-18

11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! 13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in



among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. NKJV

Apostle Paul turns to the Gentiles again and once more asks a rhetorical question; have the Jews stumbled so that they should fall? His answer once again is a very emphatic “certainly not!” He then explains the purpose of the failure of the Jewish people; their failure to believe became a blessing (riches) to the non-Jews (Gentiles), in light of this their salvation then would be a greater blessing to the non-Jews.

Apostle Paul then emphasizes that his ministry is to the Gentiles because he wants to make the Jews jealous so that they would come to faith. He says once again that the failure of the Jews to believe the gospel meant that the world, i.e. Gentiles, then their acceptance of the gospel would become a greater blessing which he terms as life from the dead.

He then uses the analogy of first fruit and a lump of dough; the first fruit is the first grains that appear and if these are good then the rest of the crop will also be good and if the lump from which the bread is made is good, so the whole loaf would be good and if the root of the tree is good so would the branches be. But he says that some of these branches have been cut off (by God) because of unbelief. The we non-Jews who he refers to as branches from a wild olive tree were grafted into the natural olive tree and began to benefit from the richness of the roots. He then warns the non-Jews not to boast against the natural branches (Jews) and reminds them that the root (Israel) supports them.

Until today much of the church still believes that God is finished with Israel and we (the church) have replaced them, this is known as replacement theology. This thinking cannot stand in the light of Apostle Paul’s letter here where he says that that they have not stumbled completely, i.e. they are not totally condemned. He warns us, non-Jews not to boast against the Jews, yet we see whole churches and denominations teaching that Israel cannot be saved because they are under the law and we Christians are better than them because we believe in the grace of God. The promise is that Israel will come to faith, as we will see in the next lesson. Apostle Paul refers to non-Jews as branches from a wild olive tree. A wild olive tree is practically useless because it grows in the desert and has little fruit which can’t be used for anything, God took us out and grafted us into His olive tree, the roots of which are the covenants, the Torah that God gave to Israel. Our faith has as its foundations the Torah and the prophets, the New Testament (Brit Hadashah) is based on them. So we owe a great debt to Israel so we should not become proud and speak against them, rather we should bless them and pray for them

ⁱ James 2:26

