

Romans 11:1-10 NASB

“Looking into a deep mystery”

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ ‘Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.’ ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? ‘I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.’ ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God’s* gracious choice. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; ⁸ just as it is written, ‘GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.’

⁹ And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.’
¹⁰ ‘LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.’”

**A great mystery swirled in the early Church.
Some still can’t figure out this puzzler.**

To what mystery do I refer?

The Bible is largely a Jewish book.

- **Israelites wrote nearly all of it.**
- **The prophets were Israelites.**
- **Jesus was a Jew.**
- **All the Apostles were Jews.**
- **For the first ten years the Church existed, missionaries preached only to Jews.**



Yet within another ten years (by about 50 AD), most of the people accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, were Gentiles.

**As a result, Jesus’ Church, which began almost entirely Jewish, became predominantly Gentile.
Jews remained a small minority after that.**

What caused that change?

Given that Israelites wrote the Old Testament:

- The prophets were **Israelites**;
- **Jesus and his** Apostles all were Jews;
- For the first ten years of the church’s existence, missionaries preached only to Jews, yet the church became mostly Gentile.

What happened?

Many wondered if that switch meant that God rejected his chosen people.

Suppose the high school of a local town had never won a state football championship.

Many parents and townspeople as well as the coaches dreamed of winning that title.

“Bring a championship trophy to our town.”

When folks got together at the community center and the town watering holes, they talked mainly about statewide success.

In their homes and at church dinners, they fantasized about having a coach and team that could win a championship and bring glory to the town.

One year the dream came true.

Right through the playoffs, the team won every game and earned that trophy.



The big day arrived to honor the players and coaches.

Noisy, loyal fans jammed the football stadium and field to honor the team.

They crammed into every space.

But a strange thing happened.

When you talked to the fans, you learned that most came from North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska.

Nearly all the town folks stayed home.

Would you wonder what happened?

A decades-old dream came to fruition, yet most of the folks who hoped for it didn’t celebrate.

Our Romans 11 text deals with that type of mystery.

Why didn’t the Jews accept Jesus as the Christ?

Evidence showed they snubbed Christ,

Did the Jews rebuff of Jesus mean that God rejected the Jews?

The Apostle Paul commented on this mystery:

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”

Paul reasoned that if God rejected the Jews, He excluded Paul, too; he was born a “prominent” Jew.

“² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with

God against Israel? ³ ‘Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.’ ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? ‘I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.’ ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God’s* gracious choice. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

The majority of Jews rejected Christ.

But Paul told the church in Rome that God hadn’t rejected the Jews.

What evidence did he offer?

A remnant of Jews remained faithful.

This strange word *remnant* appears at times in the Bible.

What does remnant have to do with anything?
You possibly know that most folks misunderstand the way the Bible uses the word remnant.

In the Bible, several different terms are translated *remnant*.

They all carry the same meaning that remnant conveys in our speech.

You’re possibly thinking right now, “**Do I really want to know what *remnant* means?**”
And you’ve already concluded, “Bob’s going to tell me anyhow.”

Do you wonder: Is it worth trying to understand?

Imagine that you own a sizeable cattle ranch.

Late in the afternoon, you walk wearily into your ranch-house, kick off your boots, pop open a soft drink, and sit down to relax.

You look at your watch to check the time.

You discover that your diamond-studded watch is missing; it must have fallen off out in the field.

You go back out to look for it.

After searching a long time, you finally find it.

There’s good news, and there’s bad news.
Good news: you located your precious timepiece.

The bad news?

You find your valuable diamond studded watch deeply imbedded in a cow pie.

How badly do you want that watch now?
Is it worth extracting?



Are you wondering whether *remnant* is worth trying to separate it from its religious mess?”

Let's see if we can't clean it quickly.

As in English, remnant carries the idea of what's left over—what survives or remains.

Carpet a room and you'll likely have remnants that didn't fit into the floor plan.

BBQ steaks for a football team and your only remnants will be a few pieces of gristle.

BBQ steaks for PETA people; you'll have lots of remnants, but you may not be one of them.



You know the meaning of remnant.

How did a word like *remnant* gain such Scriptural prominence?

Start when God told Abraham (circa 1750 BC:

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”¹

Think what the Lord promised Abram:

- **His descendants would become a great nation;**
- **One of his descendants would bless the world;**
- **What Abram didn't and maybe couldn't comprehend was that God our Creator intended to later visit this planet;**
- **He would be born in the flesh as one of Abe's descendants;**
- **This “Divine” progeny would bring the potential to save every human being from death.**

To summarize:

- **A nation would come about through Abe's great, great grandkids;**
- **From that nation a special person would be born.**

God gave the nation descended from Abram a divine mission:

- **God chose them;**
- **They must obey God and trust Him;**
- **They must continue to exist as a nation;**

¹ Genesis 12:1-3 NIV God later changed Abram's name to Abraham

- **They must follow the religion, which the Divine son would teach.**

Returning to our local town’s potential for winning a trophy; the community must stay in existence and maintain their schools.

The school also must field a football squad.

Now we need to alter our parable somewhat.

Focus a moment on the football team.

The team needs an exceptional player to lead them in winning the championship.

The town and school form a huge rally squad of young people to cheer and support the team.

They give the rally squad special uniforms, feed them, and train them.



The squad should be honored and grateful for the exceptional favors, shouldn’t they?

- They receive classy uniforms;
- exceptional living facilities;
- the finest food;
- and special attention.

No other town has ever invested in anything like this rally squad.

The town has great expectations for the rally squad and for the honor they’ll bring to the team. **Yet you soon notice changes in the rally squad:**

- They begin to lose their enthusiasm;
- Though they’ve been given everything, they brag about who they are.
- They falter in their allegiance.
- Many of the girls date guys from cities west.
- The guys date girls from cities east of town.

Only a few of the original rally squad stay faithful to the town team.

I’m not making a far-fetched comparison.

The Lord chose Abe’s descendants when they were a tiny, powerless group.

- He gave them a mission and real estate.
- They lived in houses they didn’t build, crops in fields already tilled, and they ate from fruit trees they didn’t plant.
- Israel enjoyed many God-given privileges.

God meant for them to be a cheering squad and support group for His Christ-Messiah.

Israel should have acted gratefully.

Instead they became proud, greedy, lapsed into immorality, and worshipped other gods.

God didn’t give up his plan.

By his grace he preserved a few, who stayed faithful.

The Lord always does that.

God's people sometimes get discouraged because they appear to be a tiny minority.

Most folks want to attend churches that overflow with activity; their moral lives, beliefs, and what the leaders teach and preach become secondary.

Many others would rather sleep in, read the paper, watch NFL, the NBA, or do chores.

The majority has never shown interest in serving the Lord.

Even the prophet Elijah got discouraged.

That's why Paul wrote:

"Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'?"

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

Don't get down Elijah. You're not the sole survivor here. I've got 7,000 others out there.

Three vital thoughts:

- 1. The Lord always finishes what he starts.**
- 2. The Lord doesn't need large crews to get his jobs done.**

Isaiah 7 informs us that the prophet Isaiah had a son named *Shear Jashrub*.

That's hardly an everyday name, is it?

In about 700 BC, due to their disobedience, the Israelite nation was reduced to a tiny fraction of what they once were. Their remnant small kingdom was then known as Judah. Two larger neighboring nations brought their armies to Jerusalem, surrounded it and threatened to destroy it. That's when the Lord told Isaiah to go outside of town where an aqueduct emptied into the Upper Pool and take his son with him. Isaiah was to take a message from the Lord to Judah's king. The Lord's message was,

"The two kings that now threaten you are a couple of sticks pulled out of the fire. They won't succeed. Your son Shear Jashrub will be a sign of that."

In Hebrew, *Shear Jashrub* means "a remnant will return." *Shear* means "remnant." *Jashrub* means "*will return*."



3. But what about that remnant--that group that stays faithful to the Lord?

Should they boast of their relationship with God?



In the 1980s, Norma and I heard a speaker at Boston Garden.

At the time, this minister led one of the fastest-growing religious movements in the world.

Their emphasis on preaching Christ to the world impressed us.

During the sermon, the preacher claimed his group was God’s remnant.

The statement seemed prideful.

That movement later fell into disarray.

When we boast that we are God’s chosen, his elect, or his remnant, we do so at great risk.

Ezra chapter nine is a good starting place for a better understanding of God’s *remnant*.

- **There’s never a place for human pride.**
- **If we remain, it’s because of God’s grace.**

- **He preserves us to bring glory to Jesus his Son, never to any human being.**

Join us in praying that all will openly proclaim Jesus as Lord and live humbly as he taught us.

God always completes his plans—finishes his work.

We must trust him regardless of circumstances.

To God our Creator be the glory—always!

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com