

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 11: 11-15

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Romans chapter 11, verses 11 to 15.

Paul uses the example of the Israelites to illustrate the wisdom of God's election within His sovereignty. First, we must recognize that this is God's sovereignty. God is the Lord who created the universe and all things; over His creation, God has complete sovereignty, accomplishing His eternal plan according to what pleases His will. As created beings, we have no standing or position to make any comments.

Second, we must recognize that the wisdom of God's election is executed entirely in accordance with the principles of God's righteousness, carried out in love and mercy. If we can understand God's wisdom, we can prepare ourselves according to the principles by which God acts and thus obtain God's best blessings. Therefore, we must learn from the example of the Israelites how to become the remnant chosen by God.

God first called Abraham, the ancestor of Israel, and Abraham, in faith, let go of everything to follow God. Abraham gave birth to Isaac, who was Abraham's heir according to the promise; in faith, he inherited Abraham's estate. Isaac gave birth to Jacob, who, because he valued what God valued, was molded by the Holy Spirit throughout his life, transformed from a grasping person into God's prince, extending blessings to others wherever he went. Jacob had 12 sons, who became the 12 tribes of Israel, and the Israelites became God's called chosen people in the Old Testament.

However, the history of Israel proves that they were a stiff-necked people. They forsook God, did not listen to His words, and did not keep His covenant. Therefore, most Israelites became stubborn and unyielding or pleasure-seeking people. God, according to grace, chose a minority from among the Israelites to become the

remnant of Israel. Through this Israelite remnant, God accomplished His will and executed His plan.

Verse 11: “Now I say, did they stumble that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.”

Most Israelites stumbled, yet God did not want them to remain in a fallen state. God desired to bring salvation, so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be born through the Israelite remnant and to live among the Israelites. He is Emmanuel, God with men.

During Jesus’ ministry on earth, He called disciples from among the Israelites to follow Him; these disciples were a minority remnant among the Israelites. According to God’s plan, Jesus was crucified by the Israelites, accomplished redemption, rose from the dead, and enabled all who believe in Him to receive eternal life.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out, Jesus’ disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, began to preach the gospel, and established the Jerusalem church; the gospel began to spread among the Israelites. However, in the early church, only a minority of Israelites were willing to believe; most Israelites stumbled, and salvation came to the Gentiles.

God did not intend for the Israelites to fall but to bring salvation to the Gentiles, so that when the Israelites saw the Gentiles receiving grace, they would be provoked to jealousy and also repent to accept salvation—this is the wisdom of God’s election. The gospel began with the Israelites; when the Israelites stumbled, the gospel spread to the Gentiles and flourished among them, to provoke the Israelites to accept the gospel.

From church history, from AD 70 when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed until today—1,950 years later—the number of Israelites who have truly been saved by

grace remains a minority remnant. The time Paul spoke of to provoke them to jealousy seems not yet to have arrived.

Verse 12: “Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!”

If their fall is riches for the world—because of the Israelites’ unbelief, the gospel turned to the Gentiles and was to be preached to the ends of the earth; the rich grace of Jesus Christ became riches for the world. Because of their unbelief, the Israelites lacked grace. Their lack precisely reflects the riches the Gentiles obtained by believing in Jesus Christ. How much more their fullness! Paul is certain that the Israelites’ stumbling is not permanent; when the time comes, they will surely repent. On that day, they too will manifest God’s fullness, and will not the Gentiles then receive even greater riches?

Verse 13: “For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,”

“I speak to you Gentiles” means that the Israelites seem to have been set aside by God; they stumbled, and the gospel turned to the Gentiles and flourished among them. Paul was writing to the church in Rome, a church primarily of Gentiles, though it included some Jews. Paul speaks specifically to the Gentiles in the Roman church and also to the saints in today’s church, because he is an apostle to the Gentiles.

In Acts 9:15, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” (NKJV) This was when Paul had just been saved and baptized; God, through Ananias, indicated that He would use Paul to proclaim Christ’s name among the Gentiles.

Later, in his first epistle, Galatians 2:9, Paul also says, “and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me,

they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” (NKJV)

Paul personally confirmed that he had received the ministry of apostle to the Gentiles; thus, he says here, “I magnify my ministry.” The Chinese Union Version translates it somewhat reservedly; the original Greek meaning of “magnify” is actually “glorify.” Paul highly valued his ministry and took glory in it; his entire life was for this ministry, and ultimately, he was martyred for it.

Ministry is a very important word; we need to spend some time examining it. The Greek word for “ministry” is diakonia, generally translated in English as “ministry.” In Chinese, it is mostly translated as 職分, which means part of ministry of Jesus Christ or just ministry (there’s no distinguish in English; both came from the same Greek word). The original meaning is to receive a commission and exert all effort to carry it out.

For example, some saints have a burden for family ministry and devote themselves to serving in family matters; some have a burden for children’s ministry and participate in children’s work; some have a burden for meals and participate in love-feast ministry. A healthy church should have various ministries, allowing willing saints to learn to serve. Through practical exercise, they can develop their gifts and, in the process, discover the commission God has given them.

Because people have various needs, the church needs various ministries to meet those needs. But church ministries differ from worldly organizations; organizations merely satisfy human needs, but the ultimate purpose of ministry is to bring people to God. Meeting needs only helps open people’s hearts; the final goal is to connect people with God.

From this definition, there is actually only one ministry in the entire New Testament: the ministry of Jesus Christ. The disciples received Jesus Christ’s commission to go into all the world and testify of Christ. The Chinese Union Version here translates it as 職分 rather than 職事 which I personally think is excellent. It

indicates that Paul's ministry is a part of Jesus Christ's New Testament ministry, hence called an 職分。

Paul served in local churches, fulfilling his ministry. His ministry was part of Jesus Christ's ministry, so he was serving the body of Christ. Each of our ministry is done for the few saints we serve. Jesus will say that we are building the body of Christ. Our vision and ability are limited; what we do may seem insignificant to people, but it is part of Jesus Christ's New Testament ministry. Without our faithful services, Jesus Christ's ministry cannot be complete.

Dear brothers and sisters, if we have the same vision as Paul, we can understand why he says he magnifies his ministry. The word "ministry" can also be translated as "provision" or "supply," indicating the principle of ministry operation: supplying life.

Our ministry may involve many tedious tasks, such as preparing food—washing, cutting, stir-frying, cooking—but every action is an outpouring of love, not to gain praise but to let saints enjoy your loving dedication. This warms hearts and lets people feel the sweetness of home. So, you are not just supplying food; you are supplying life.

The word "ministry" can also be translated as "waiting at table," like a servant attending the master's meal. His attitude is gentle and humble; his attention is always on the master—adding water when it is low, clearing plates when utensils are set down, serving the next dish, making the master's dining experience pleasant and comfortable. Thus, when we serve, we serve those we minister to like a servant.

The Greek word diakonia ends with ia, emphasizing its nature. Though ministry involves serving people, its nature is glorious, heavenly, and exalted. Thus, Paul says, "I magnify my ministry."

Dear brothers and sisters, may we, like Paul, magnify our ministry and regard it as the most important thing in our lives. For it brings people to God, connects the temporal to the eternal, and the earthly to the heavenly. All our earthly enjoyments

and gains will one day pass away, but what we do for brothers and sisters will remain forever. How can we not magnify our ministry?

Verse 14: “if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.”

Paul magnifies his ministry among the Gentiles—preaching the gospel, establishing churches, making Gentiles God’s chosen people in the New Testament, enjoying God’s rich supply. Perhaps his own flesh and blood, the Israelites, can be provoked to jealousy and repent to turn to salvation.

The Greek word for “provoke to jealousy” is *parazelo*, composed of two parts: *para*, meaning “beside,” and *zeloo*, meaning “boil over with desire.” The whole word means standing beside and fanning the flames to stir up jealousy in the heart. Paul truly desired his own flesh and blood to be saved, so he labored diligently among the Gentiles—to make the Jews see that the salvation originally theirs was obtained by the Gentiles while they themselves missed it. This would stir jealousy in their hearts and provoke them, so that perhaps some of them could be saved.

Verse 15: “For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”

If their being cast away—here “cast away” is a different Greek word from “rejected,” so it is not rejection but temporarily set aside. The gospel came to the Gentiles, and the world could be reconciled to God. We have seen the word “reconciling” before; its original meaning is equal exchange—Jesus Christ’s precious blood exchanged for our sins, enabling us to be reconciled to God. This word appears in Romans 5:10: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (NKJV)

There it speaks of each of us, through the death of God's Son paying our sin debt, being reconciled to God. Here in this verse, Paul speaks of God's dispensational plan: salvation began with the Israelites; later, because of their unbelief, the gospel turned to the Gentiles. Because the Israelites were cast away, the result was that the world was reconciled to God.

Paul is not speaking of individual reconciliation to God but of the world's reconciliation. The Greek word for "world" is kosmos, translated elsewhere as "world" or "mankind." For example, in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (NKJV) In this familiar verse, "world" is the Greek word kosmos. Because the Israelites were cast away, the world could be reconciled to God.

Yet God has not rejected the Israelites; when Christ returns, the Israelites will be received again by God—what will that be but life from the dead? "Life from the dead" is an inaccurate translation; the original has no concept of resurrection. The KJV translates it as "life from the dead," meaning that because of unbelief, the Israelites fell into a state of death; when they are received again, will they not all receive life? It does not mean dead Israelites will rise but that the remaining Israelites will all receive life.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we all see what Paul repeatedly emphasizes here: God's dispensational plan of redemption. The gospel began with the Israelites; because of their unbelief, the gospel came to the Gentiles. Yet God has not rejected the Israelites; one day, the Israelites will be received again. If their being cast away enabled the Gentiles to be reconciled to God, when they are received again by God, will not life fill the entire world? May we have a correct view of the Israelites—they are only temporarily set aside by God. Though they broke God's covenant, God remains the covenant-keeping God of lovingkindness.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! Through Paul's words in Romans, we see how open minded Paul was. On one hand, he magnified his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles; on the other hand, he truly loved his own flesh and blood,

the Israelites. He had complete knowledge of God's dispensational plan, knowing that his ministry among the Gentiles was part of God's eternal plan. Because of his faithful services, the Israelites will be provoked and received again by God. Help us also see that today in the church, there are various ministries, and give us an open heart to know that all ministries are part of Jesus Christ's New Testament ministry. Help us faithfully serve in our ministry while viewing other ministries with appreciation and inclusiveness, knowing that all is for building the body of Christ, that we may soon welcome the Lord's return. Bless all the ministries in the church to bring people to Christ and receive Christ's rich supply. We pray, petition, and give thanks in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.