

## Entering God's Rest

**Texts:** Romans 11:19-23; Hebrews 3:7-13, 18-19; 4:9-12

Today I'd like to begin by reading a short passage in Romans chapter 11 to you.

- **Romans 11:19-23 HCSB** Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." (20) True enough; they were broken off by unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. (22) Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you--if you remain in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. (23) And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again.

### Introduction: What is "God's Rest"?

Hearing Paul talk about broken branches, and grafting we may at first blush think that Paul has lapsed into a discussion on agronomy or farming. But the context is the issue of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Israel was the first group to be offered the chance to enter God's kingdom, but they rejected the opportunity and were, in turn, rejected by God. That's what Paul meant when he said that Israel was "broken off" from the root.

Elsewhere, another phrase that was used to describe what happened to Israel was that they were unable to "enter God's rest".

- **Hebrews 3:7-13 HCSB** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: **Today, if you hear His voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the desert, (9) where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works (10) for 40 years. Therefore I was provoked with this generation and said, "They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known My ways." (11) So I swore in My anger, "They will not enter My rest."**

### What "God's Rest" was not – land of Canaan; peaceful circumstances

But what exactly was this rest? First, I'll tell you what it was NOT. We know that God did not mean simply the land of Canaan because they arrived in Canaan and they were still living in Canaan when they refused the Messiah and were "broken off". That also means that "God's rest" does not mean peaceful circumstances because if anything, their arrival in Canaan was marked by an increase in warfare. Even years after they lived in Canaan they continued to be at war with the Philistines, the Amalakites, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans etc.

### What "God's Rest" was – God's care and rule

Let's try to determine what God's rest is. If you turn to the book of Psalms you will find the following statement in:

- **Psalms 25:12-13 HCSB** Who is the person who fears the LORD? He will show him the way he should choose. (13) He will live a good life, and his descendants will inherit the land.
- **Psalms 37:9 HCSB** For evildoers will be destroyed, but those who put their hope in the LORD will inherit the land.
- **Psalms 37:11 HCSB** But the humble will inherit the land and will enjoy abundant prosperity.
- **Psalms 37:22 HCSB** Those who are blessed by Him will inherit the land, but those cursed by Him will be destroyed.

- **Psalms 37:29 HCSB** The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it permanently.

We believe that God, being immutable, that is to say, unchangeable, operates the same way in the Old Covenant and the New. It was always about grace and faith. It was always about the coming of the Messiah, whether He was to come in the future (as it was for those who lived prior to His coming) or whether He has already come (as it is with us presently). In fact, both groups are STILL patiently waiting for the King's ultimate Coming. Having said that, let's look at what the Master had to say in the New Covenant. Turn if you would to Matthew 5.

- **Matthew 5:3 HCSB** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- **Matthew 5:5 HCSB** Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth.
- **Matthew 5:10 HCSB** Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Does that sound familiar? Jesus' statements are remarkably similar to David's aren't they? That's because the fundamental principles by which God operates do not change over time. This gives us an indication of what God's rest is. When we

- Fear the Lord (Psalm 25:12-13)
- Put our hope in the Lord (Psalm 37:9)
- Are humble or poor in spirit (Psalm 37:11; Matthew 5:3)
- Receive God's blessing (Psalm 37:22)
- Are righteous (Psalm 37:29; Matthew 5:10)
- Are gentle (Matthew 5:5)

We get to enter into God's Kingdom. As His subjects, His children, we come under His care. No matter what our circumstances we can be at rest, knowing who our Savior and King is.

- **Hebrews 4:9-12 HCSB** A Sabbath rest remains, therefore, for God's people. (10) For the person who has entered His rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from His. (11) Let us then make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. (12) For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

Many would like to take verse 10 and stop there, emphasizing to the point of taking out of context "rest from works". However, I'd like you to note that that is NOT the message of Hebrews 4. The very next verse says "make every effort" and implies "obey". The emphasis is not on "don't work" but "rest from your OWN works." We are to be guided by the Scriptures, not our feelings or cultural biases.

### **Israel's rejection is neither universal nor permanent**

Now when Paul spoke of Israel being "broken off" or the author of Hebrews spoke of them as "not entering God's rest", they did not mean that this break was universal.

- **Romans 11:1 HCSB** I ask, then, has God rejected His people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Since, the twelve Apostles and Paul were all Jews and they are the ones who brought us the precious message of the Gospel, there is no room for the anti-Semitic idea that all of Israel was universally divorced.

Neither does it mean that this break is permanent.

- **Romans 11:1 HCSB** I ask, then, has God rejected His people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.
- **Romans 11:11 HCSB** I ask, then, have they stumbled so as to fall? Absolutely not! On the contrary, by their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous.

- [Romans 11:23 HCSB](#) And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again.

Therefore the lesson here is not that Israel was rejected and we Gentiles accepted. There is no anti-Semitism in this passage.

### **Lesson 1: Be humble. (Romans 11:18, 20-21, 25)**

The principle lesson that Paul was trying to pass on was...

- [Romans 11:18 HCSB](#) do not brag that you are better than those branches. But if you do brag--you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you.
- [Romans 11:20-21 HCSB](#) True enough; they were broken off by unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.
- [Romans 11:25 HCSB](#) So that you will not be conceited, brothers, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery: a partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

### **Lesson 2: Be grateful. (Romans 11:16)**

A secondary lesson is that we need to be grateful to the Hebrew people for through them we received the law, the prophets, a long history of interaction with holy God, the Messiah, the apostles and all of the Scriptures!

- [Romans 11:16 HCSB](#) Now if the firstfruits offered up are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

### **Lesson 3: Be afraid. (Romans 11:20-22; Hebrews 3:12-13)**

A third lesson that Paul imparted was that we need to develop a reverential fear lest we make the same mistake they did!

- [Romans 11:20-22 HCSB](#) True enough; they were broken off by unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. (22) Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you--if you remain in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.
- [Hebrews 3:12-13 HCSB](#) Watch out, brothers, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that departs from the living God. (13) But encourage each other daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception.

### **Lesson 4: Have faith. (Hebrews 3:18-19)**

What is it that we are to fear? What should we be cautious of?

- [Hebrews 3:18-19 HCSB](#) And to whom did He "swear that they would not enter His rest," if not those who disobeyed? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The people of Israel's lack of faith led to fear of giants and walled cities. Their lack of faith led to disobedience of God's command to go forward and conquer.

Our lack of faith will do the same. We must constantly be reminding ourselves of God's greatness. We must be diligent about the exercise of faith in His Word and His care. We must douse the devil's flaming arrows with the shield of faith.