

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

**GOD'S
ECONOMY**

**IN HIS
SELECTION**

WITNESS LEE

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Living Stream Ministry
Anaheim, CA • www.lsm.org

GOD'S ECONOMY IN HIS SELECTION

God has an economy, a divine arrangement, in His selection. This divine arrangement or administration is over the entire world and the whole human race. This administration under God's sovereignty is His divine economy.

A REMNANT RESERVED BY GRACE

In [Romans 11:1](#) Paul asks, “I say then, Has God cast away His people? Certainly not!” Paul was an excellent attorney, capable of arguing and winning either side of a case. If we did not have [Romans 11](#), we would certainly think that God, after having chosen Israel, must have changed His mind. [Chapters nine and ten of Romans](#) seem to indicate that God has given up Israel. Because some people think this way Paul asked, “Has God cast away His people?” Then he answered the question himself, saying strongly, “Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite out of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says in the case

of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what does the divine answer say to him? I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” ([11:1-4](#)). Elijah, a prophet of God, pleaded with God against Israel. However, God told Elijah not to accuse the people before Him because He had reserved to Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Paul continues, “So then at the present time also there is a remnant according to the selection of grace. But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace” ([vv. 5-6](#)).

Paul argued in a marvelous way, always winning his case regardless of which side of the question he debated. When in [chapter 10](#) he said that Israel was bad, he proved how bad they were. [Romans 10:21](#) says, “But to Israel he says, All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contradicting people.” Certainly the worst people on earth are a disobedient and contradicting people. When we read a statement like this we are inclined to say, “Israel’s situation is hopeless. Israel is finished.” However, when we come to [chapter eleven](#) we see a record of

how the Lord Himself argued with Elijah. Elijah said, “Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars.” Both of these statements were true. Then Elijah said, “I am left alone, and they seek my life.” The Lord came to Elijah and seemed to say, “Elijah, listen to Me. You are not alone. I have reserved seven thousand men. Elijah, what are you talking about?” In [chapter ten](#) it appeared that, in a sense, Paul was against Israel. Now in [chapter eleven](#) he is in favor of Israel. In [11:5](#) Paul says that “at the present time also there is a remnant according to the selection of grace.” Paul simply cannot be defeated. Paul was saying, “Not only were seven thousand men reserved by God in the time of Elijah, but at the present time, the time in which we are living, God still has a selection according to grace. Today also there is a remnant reserved.” The principle is the same for our own time. Regardless of how far Christianity has degraded, we believe that among the thousands and even millions of Christians there are a number, a remnant, that have been reserved by God.

I am not speaking proudly, but I consider myself as one whom the Lord has reserved. How do you feel about yourself? A number of times in the past years my thought was the same as

Elijah's. But I praise the Lord that eventually I discovered that the Lord had reserved a good number to Himself. God has reserved a remnant for His eternal purpose. Do not be disappointed.

Verse 6 says, "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace." Never forget that we have all been reserved by grace. It is not the result of our work; it is altogether by His grace. If it were otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.

"What then? That which Israel is seeking for he has not obtained, but those who were chosen have obtained it, and the rest were hardened" (v. 7). In principle, the situation today is the same. What have we to boast of? Only the grace of the Lord.

Verse 8 says, "As it is written, God gave them a spirit of deep sleep, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, until this very day." Is this our condition? Some people have eyes, but their eyes have lost their sight; some have ears, but their ears have lost their function. This is exactly the situation in our own time. In 1937 I was assigned by the work of the Lord to travel throughout northern China with the purpose of sharing with Christianity all the truths that the Lord had given us. I was assigned to do this by the work under

the leadership of Brother Nee. I was charged not to stay in any of the local churches, but to travel throughout northern China. During that time I performed a good deal of traveling ministry in denominations. By that I learned that the situation was pitiful. Not many people had a heart; most did not have eyes to see or ears to hear. Then I gave up traveling and stayed in Cheefoo, my home town. I was clearly burdened by the Lord not to travel anymore but simply to stay in that city with the local church. After I remained there for four years, a revival occurred.

Let me tell you another story. During 1934 I stayed for quite some time in Shanghai with Brother Nee. One day as we were driving to another city he said to me, “Brother, the denominations have rejected us.” Quoting Paul’s word in [Acts 13:46](#) he said, “Let us go to the Gentiles.” Since that time the work in the Lord’s recovery took a definite turn toward the Gentiles. Since the time I first stayed with Brother Nee in 1933 until the time we parted from one another in 1950, he did not receive one invitation from any denomination in China. Although no denomination invited him to minister, his books are very popular. Regardless of the situation, the Lord has His remnant today.

Let us go on to [verse 9](#). “And David says, Let their table become a snare and a trap and a cause of falling and a just retribution to them.” We have seen the same thing happen in today’s situation.

[Verse 10](#) says, “Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and let them bend their back continually.” Is it not the same in today’s Christianity? Are not the eyes of many darkened and their backs bent? They lack the sight to see and are unable to stand upright.

THE NATIONS SAVED

God’s economy in His selection is firstly with the remnant reserved by grace and secondly with the nations, the Gentiles saved through Israel’s stumbling. In [verse 11](#) Paul says, “I say then, Have they stumbled that they might fall? Certainly not! But by their false step salvation has come to the nations to provoke them to jealousy.” In [9:32](#) Paul said that Israel “stumbled at the Stone of stumbling.” Now in [11:11](#) he says that they have not stumbled that they might fall. Paul developed his argument very carefully, saying that they stumbled, but that they did not fall. In the next part of [verse 11](#) Paul describes their stumbling as a “false step.” As a result of this false step of unbelief, salvation has come to the nations.

What a case Paul presents, and what an attorney he was! No one can defeat him. Everyone must submit to him. In 11:12 Paul says, “Now if their false step is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the nations; how much more will their fullness be?” The false step made by Israel has become the riches of the world and their loss the riches of the nations. Who other than Paul is capable of arguing in this way?

In 11:13 Paul says that he magnifies his ministry among the nations. “For I speak to you, the nations. Since I am indeed an apostle of the nations, I glorify my ministry, if somehow I may provoke those of my flesh to jealousy and save some of them.” Although Paul was glorifying his ministry among the nations, he was actually debating for Israel.

We need to read verse 15 carefully. “For if their casting aside is the reconciliation of the world, what will be their receiving back but life from among the dead?” Please notice that Paul did not say “casting away.” To cast away is one thing; to cast aside is another. In 11:1 Paul asks, “Has God cast away His people?” Paul answered the question himself saying, “Certainly not!” Hence, there is a significant difference between being cast away and being cast aside. To be cast

away means to be given up, while to be cast aside means to be put aside for a period of time. Therefore, Paul's thought was that God had cast aside Israel, not that He had cast them away.

Let us read [verses 16 through 18](#). "Now if the dough offered as the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a fellow-partaker of the root of the fatness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches; but if you boast, remember that you do not bear the root, but the root you." Who is the root of the olive tree, and who is the dough offered as the firstfruit? I believe that the correct answer is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In [11:28](#) Paul says that Israel is "beloved for the fathers' sake." The "fathers" refers to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three patriarchs were the root of the olive tree and the dough offered as the firstfruit.

We need to be clear regarding the difference between the dough offered as the firstfruit and the lump. Suppose you have a lump of dough for baking cakes and you take a piece of dough out of that lump. That piece of dough may be called the firstfruit. In the Bible the dough offered as

the firstfruit was not for the people to eat; it was first offered to God and then given to the priests to be their food. According to [Numbers 15:18-21](#), God told Israel that after they had entered the land they had to offer the first piece of dough to the Lord. That piece of dough was termed the firstfruit, and the phrase “the dough offered as the firstfruit” in [Romans 11:16](#) is a reference to it. The Apostle Paul uses this first piece of dough to illustrate Abraham along with Isaac and Jacob. These three patriarchs should be considered as one person, and the spiritual experiences of the three are actually the experiences of one person. These three patriarchs were and still are the first piece of dough offered to God as the firstfruit, and all of their descendants are the whole lump. Likewise, the three patriarchs were and still are the root of God’s cultivated olive tree ([Jer. 11:16](#)), and all of their descendants are the branches. Therefore, Paul’s argument is that if the dough offered to God is holy, then the entire lump is holy. This means that all the Israelites are holy. Furthermore, if the root, the patriarchs, is holy, then all the branches, the descendants of the patriarchs, are also holy. Although Israel has stumbled, they did not fall. They have been cut off temporarily; later they will be grafted in again.

In Romans 9 the chosen ones of God are likened to clay, and in Romans 11 they are likened to a lump of flour used for making cakes. Which do you think is better? Would you like to be a piece of clay or a piece of dough? Although I prefer to be a piece of dough, it is still good to be clay because clay is used to make vessels of mercy to contain Christ. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 4:7 we are told that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” Furthermore, 2 Timothy 2:20 says, “There are...gold and silver vessels...unto honor.” The clay vessels in Romans 9 are filled by calling on the name of the Lord as revealed in Romans 10. The same is true for the vessels in 2 Timothy 2:20.

In verse 22 of that chapter we are told that the seekers of the Lord need to call upon Him out of a pure heart. Therefore, the way in which the vessels of honor are filled is by calling upon the name of the Lord.

Romans 9 shows us that we are pieces of clay made into vessels which contain Christ. This is wonderful. However, I am even happier to be a piece of dough, a part of the lump. Clay has no life, but the lump is a matter of life, being made from fine wheat flour. Although clay is useful in making vessels to contain Christ for the glory of

God, the lump is for the satisfaction of God; it is offered to God as food for His satisfaction. A piece of lifeless clay cannot satisfy God. Only in the lump do we have the living element which satisfies God.

While the dough is for God's satisfaction, the root is for our satisfaction. [Romans 11:17](#) says that we, "being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a fellow-partaker of the root of the fatness of the olive tree." The lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis were the root of the fatness of the olive tree. The entire olive tree depends upon their fatness. Praise the Lord that we, the wild olive tree, have been grafted into God's cultivated olive tree that we might be fellow-partakers of its root of fatness! This is our enjoyment. God enjoys the dough; we enjoy the root. Both the dough and the root are of the plant life, the life which satisfies God and man. Both the wheat and the olive produce enjoyment and satisfaction for God and man. Praise the Lord! Once again we see how deep a writer was Paul. Nothing in Romans is superficial.

In [verse 17](#) Paul says that we, the Gentiles, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in and became a partaker of the root. Grafting is a matter of life. For the branch of a wild tree to be grafted

into a cultivated tree is for it to receive the life of the cultivated tree. Hence, it is not a matter for us Gentiles to change our religion, but to receive the life of the root, which life is Christ. Many Gentiles have turned from their heathen religions to the Christian religion without ever receiving the life of Christ. They have never been grafted into the olive tree cultivated by God with Christ as life. But we have been grafted in to enjoy the riches of Christ's life with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Praise the Lord!

Paul, speaking on behalf of the Gentiles, says in [verse 19](#), “You will say then, Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” The Gentiles may think this way. Paul answered, “Right. They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be high-minded, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; on those who fell, severity; but on you the kindness of God, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off” ([vv. 20-22](#)). How wise is Paul’s word.

Therefore, by Israel’s false step, by their stumbling, salvation has come to the nations. However, Israel did not fall; they only stumbled. This is God’s economy in His selection.

ISRAEL RESTORED

“And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?” ([vv. 23-24](#)). Although Paul seems to be speaking on behalf of the Gentiles, he is actually more in favor of the Jews because he was a Jew himself. Underlying his words concerning the Gentiles is his burden for the Jews.

“For I do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in yourselves, that hardness has come upon a part of Israel until the fullness of the nations comes in” ([v. 25](#)). The “fullness of the nations” refers to the converts among the Gentiles. Now is the time when a great many Gentiles will be converted. Hence, the “fullness of the nations” has not yet been completed; it is continuing at the present time. The “fullness of the nations” is different from the phrase “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” ([Luke 21:24](#)). Some Christians confuse these two phrases. The words “until the times

of the Gentiles be fulfilled” denote the prophecy regarding the termination of Gentile power; “the fullness of the nations” denotes the completeness of the conversion among the nations.

In [verse 26](#) Paul declares, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come out of Zion; He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” At that time all the remaining Israelites will be saved. “And this is the covenant from Me to them, when I take away their sins. According to the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but according to the selection they are beloved for the fathers’ sake” ([vv. 27-28](#)). Notice the two “sakes” in [verse 28](#): “your sake” and the “fathers’ sake.” They are enemies for our sake, but beloved for the fathers’ sake. “For the free gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” ([v. 29](#)). God’s gifts and God’s calling are eternal, without repentance, without change. Once God’s gift is given, it is given forever. Once God has called us, He has called us for eternity. He would never repent of His gifts and calling. How we thank God that “with Him there is no variation” ([James 1:17](#), lit.). “For just as you once disobeyed God, but now have obtained mercy through their disobedience, so these also now have disobeyed that through your mercy they also now may obtain

mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all” ([vv. 30-32](#)). Here we see that Paul uses both disobedience and mercy as means for his argument. Man’s disobedience affords God’s mercy an opportunity, and God’s mercy brings man salvation. Thus, we see once again that Paul has won every case. God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. This is God’s economy. What can we say? All that we can say is, “Hallelujah for His mercy!” He has even used our disobedience as an enclosure to keep us as vessels upon whom He shows His mercy.

A PRAISE FOR GOD’S SELECTION

At this point Paul lifted up a praise to God, a praise for God’s selection. “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His paths! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it will be repaid to him? Because out of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen” ([vv. 33-36](#)). It seems that in [Romans 9 through 11](#) Paul has given us a map by which we may trace God’s paths. God receives

praise and glory in three stages: in the past, for all things have come out of Him; in the present, for all things are through Him; and in the future, for all things will be to Him. All things came into being out of God in the past, all things exist through Him in the present, and all things will be to Him in the future. God's selection is according to Himself, according to His choice, not according to anything else. All things are of Him, by Him, and for Him. "To Him be the glory for ever. Amen."

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