



# ROMANS Part 99

Chapter 11:1-5

## The time of the current era.



I am saying, then, Does not God thrust away His people? May it not be coming to that! For I also am an Israelite, out of Abraham's seed, Benjamin's tribe. 2 God does not thrust away His people whom He foreknew. Or have you not perceived in Elijah what the scripture is saying, as he is pleading with God against Israel? 3 Lord, Thy prophets they kill, Thine altars they dig down, and I was left alone, and they are seeking my soul. 4 But what is that which apprises saying to him? I left for Myself seven thousand men who do not bow the knee to the image of Baal. 5 Thus, then, in the current era also, there has come to be a remnant according to the choice of grace.

The identity of the Circumcision remnant, first of all, must be Circumcision. This has to be a small group of people loyal to the message that God gave Abraham. Imagine someone saying to Paul, "Paul, all seems lost for the Israel of God. Prove to us that God has not thrust away His people," and then Paul produces a company—including himself—who have abandoned the Circumcision message for a different evangel. Absurd. This would serve only to cement the initial suspicion. If Paul is using himself as an example of the remnant, then surely the conclusion could be reached, "Yes, God certainly *has* thrust away Israel," for Paul himself, in the letter to the Philippians, thrust away his nationality, his tribe, his Pharisaic pedigree, even the value of his own circumcision. (Philippians 3:4-8). My goodness. If Paul is an example of God staying true to His ancient promises, then those promises are doomed indeed.

May it not be coming to that! Paul's statement, "For I also am an Israelite," is simply the apostle explaining, in one simple sentence, his vested interest in the answer to the critical question. It is certainly not Paul offering himself as an example of why God still honors His word

to Israel. No, the Circumcision remnant *must* be true to the Abrahamic covenant. God has not forgotten His promises, and neither is He offering these promises to another people. Neither is God frustrated by the new calling of the nations, as though this would sidetrack Him and curtail His original plan. This *is* His original plan.

### THE ORIGINAL PLAN

Think of it: God calls a special people primarily to prove to all humanity, by practical experience, the incapability of flesh and blood to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). Israel is first and foremost a guinea-pig nation—a nation of demonstration—proving to all humanity, for all time, that apart from God’s enabling power and grace, humanity never can attain righteousness, especially not through law (Romans 3:19-20). God doesn’t need this evidence, but the world does.



“Without centuries of public failure, grace can’t stun.”

One gets the feeling, when Paul is sent to the nations with a message of pure grace, that this was “meant” to be the original message all along. In a sense, this is correct. Speaking as a man, this was the gospel that God would have pleasantly shocked the world with straightaway. Who isn’t tempted to unveil a special Christmas present the day they buy it, three months before Christmas? It’s hard for us to wait to bless people. Grace is God’s heart,

but it cannot be properly displayed or appreciated without the necessary preparation of works and subsequent failure. Grace must stun. Without centuries of public failure in the pleasing-of-God department, grace can’t do that. God had yet to go to a lot of trouble (and I do mean a lot of trouble) to demonstrate humanity’s inherent helplessness (works and failure).

Who wants to mutilate a bunch of penises? Who wants to thunder down from Sinai in full grouch mode with a bunch of laws carved in stone? Who wants to watch the blood of a million sheep trickle down into the Gihon Spring? Not God. This was not His heart. God Himself admits later that He took no delight in the blood of sacrifices (Psalm 51:16). The fact that “in Christ, neither circumcision is availing anything, nor uncircumcision” (Galatians 5:6) tells us that God wasn’t too crazy about circumcision either. But again, He had to do it for a demonstration. A demonstration of what?

Humanity needs to know God’s majesty. When Paul says later that we have access to the Father with confidence (Ephesians 3:12), this has no context (for appreciation) apart from the realization of how great and mighty—and, really, how unapproachable—God truly is. God must set up a Wizard of Oz-type fear and respect display (fire, smoke, lots of reverb), carried on for years, so that when humanity at last receives its backstage pass, it will truly revel in the access. The thrill thrills proportionately to the initial grasp of divine awe and greatness. Fire, smoke and lots of reverb testify to how magnificent (“great and powerful”) God truly is.

This is an imperfect example. Were it not for the investigative derring-do of Toto, the Wizard of Hollywood fame would have carried the charade into infinity. The power and might of the poser from Kansas was essentially fake. God’s power and might is real. That’s the difference. Other than this difference, the example stands. God really is this magnificent and fire-breathing. He could destroy everything with a breath. But no. He’s love. How to get everyone eventually and eternally basking in grateful hob-nobbery with the Sovereign of the Universe? Deny their presence for about four-thousand years, save for a select few who You threaten with instant death if they so much as look at You funny.

God loves to shock people with grace. He would rather have left everyone’s reproductive organs intact, foregone Sinai completely, spared a lot of sheep the slaughter block, and come out of the gate throwing candy from His golden limousine. But He had already done that with Adam and it didn’t work. Adam ho-hummed every blessing God passed beneath his nose; Adam had never experienced the opposing phenomenon.



The fact that God has bided His time with humanity this long while setting the dual stages of futility and frustration, testifies to His patience. I would have broken down about three-thousand years ago and said, “I can’t take it any more. Here! Here’s your candy! I’m loaded with it!”

It is not until sin enters the world that Adam lunges toward God in awe, thanksgiving, and longing. (Adam lunges similarly toward Eve later. He watched all of the animals copulating and found none of them attractive—

“I would have broken down  
about three-thousand years ago  
and said, ‘I can’t take it  
anymore.’”

especially not the hippopotamus. The only reason Eve attracted him was because God removed Adam’s femininity, which Adam had never seen before. God gave it to Eve, and there she stood displaying it like nobody’s business. Adam then realized how great it was and he was glad that he no longer had it. But he sure wanted it back—if you know what I mean.) Likewise, it is not until Israel has struggled for centuries between the rocks of Sin and her own inability that humanity as a whole becomes prepared for Someone Else to conquer flesh. (Behold, the pure grace message.)

The surprising thing is that God follows through with His plans for Israel. Paul writes about it here; somebody had to write about it because almost everyone doubted it. Once the example was finished, the world-at-large figured that God would scrap the example. (Preterists, today, still think that God has scrapped the example, that is, Israel.) When Israel as a guinea-pig nation had served its purpose (around the time of the calling of Paul), no one would have blamed God for calling off the engagement, especially if He compensates Israel for the trouble. God could have said, “Well done good and faithful guinea pig nation,” and then rewarded Israel handsomely for the ignoble role foisted upon her. He could have tossed Israel in a happy heap onto the lap of Paul’s gospel, or at the least relegated Israel to the lake of fire (which is the second death, i.e. unconsciousness; Revelation 20:14), and given it blessed immortality at the consummation of the eons (1 Corinthians 15:21-28). No one in Israel would have complained about any of that, especially not about the “Paul’s lap” scenario.

But no. God actually follows through with the covenant He made with Israel, the one that they could in no way fulfill. The covenant God fulfills is somewhat modified in that God does His part *and* Israel’s part when He changes that nation’s heart from one of stone to flesh. This is purely God’s act; it’s a miracle. The nation shall be born in one day. Because this isn’t really a covenant anymore (God fulfills both ends of it), God re-names it.

He decides to call it the New Covenant. (No one had ever heard of a nation being born in one day; no one had ever heard of a covenant involving only one party. This was all stunning news.) God is consistent as the sunrise and as gracious as can be with a people who have looked forward to running the Earth since God whispered the plan to Abraham in 1926 BCE.

It is slightly embarrassing, however, that the consummation of Israel's promise to run Earth lasts only 1,000 years. I may be the only one who thinks this to be absurdly short. This time period, compared to the eons, is a blip. Compared to Israel's history, it's a blip and a half. What it tells me is that God wants to get the Millennium over with. He's champing at the bit for the next development, which is to create the third earth, to bring down the New Jerusalem upon it, to eliminate funerals, and to finally jettison the awkward arrangement of priesthood. On the new Earth, God Himself dwells with humanity and priesthood has been relegated to the ash heap of history.

#### THE REMNANT AIN'T PRETTY

Last week, I shared this quote with you by A.E. Knoch from his article titled, "Refuse the Refuse, Anglo-Israelism" in Volume 27 of *Unsearchable Riches* magazine—

Why make a main issue out of a matter of no importance? We all know that there are Jews, but these lose all that distinguishes them the moment they believe. Suppose that others are Israelites. Is it worthwhile even telling them this? If we make out that this is the least advantage to them, then we are in irreconcilable conflict with God's Word...It is no advantage whatever to be an Israelite today. In practical effect it is an immense hindrance, for it breeds fleshly pride and national hypocrisy, and distorts the Scriptures to drag God's grace in the dust. It is earthly, soulish, and counter to the cross, so that they glory in their shame.

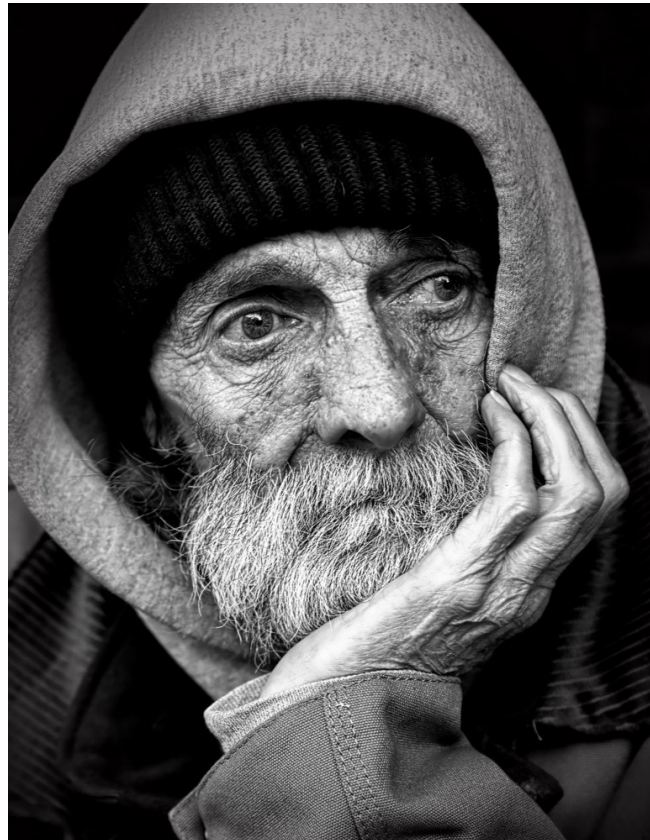
In spite of Paul's testimony that there is a remnant "in the current era," A.E. Knoch clearly denies its existence. Jews *would* lose all that distinguishes them as Jews the moment they believe, but only if Paul's is the only gospel available *to* believe. Knoch's argument assumes his premise. If there is a contemporary Circumcision remnant, however, then certainly a Jew could believe it and retain that which distinguishes him or her, just as Peter and many others did in the first century. If those of the first century occupied "the current era" but we do not, then when did "the current era" end?

Secondly, one would only be in "irreconcilable conflict" with God's Word on the matter of Israelite national advantage if, again, Knoch's premise were true. If the Circumcision remnant mysteriously (I say "mysteriously" because no proof is cited) died off, then when did it happen? This question is never asked, let alone answered. Every argument forwarded by Knoch in this paragraph depends on the death of the Circumcision remnant long before our present day.

Another of Knoch's assumptions is that the presence of a Circumcision remnant necessitates that remnant being a channel of blessing in this, the administration of God's grace. Here may be Knoch's Achilles heel. I quote again from the article—

No one who grasps the great truths which are given us in Paul's epistle to the Romans or that to the Philippians will ever concern himself with his place in the flesh or imagine that Israel has already become a channel of blessing in this administration of God's grace, for this is diametrically opposed to its character and purpose.

Who is imagining that Israel has already become a channel of blessing in this administration? Paul is certainly not insisting upon it, even while declaring the existence of the remnant. The presence of a Circumcision remnant in no way requires members of that remnant to



be actively administering Kingdom duties. In fact, the very term “remnant” defies such a conclusion. Israel performing Kingdom functions during the Millennium can certainly not be called a remnant. Even in his day, Peter—still holding fast to the Circumcision promises—did not presume such a thing. Certainly the man was not functioning in his kingdom capacity when we find him in Babylon (of all places), from whence he writes his first letter (1 Peter 5:13) in 58 AD, the same year that Paul wrote Romans. Had he “already become a channel of blessing,” Peter would have been in Jerusalem, not Babylon. We would have been able to admire his throne (Matthew 19:28). At this late date, however, Peter’s throne was still pending.

Not a single New Testament Circumcision letter written during the era of Paul, either from the pen of Peter, John, James or Jude, finds its writer exercising Jewish kingdom prerogatives, not the least of which would include ruling the other nations with a rod of iron. Rather, these men are all suffering various degrees of abuse. They are all writing letters from desperate outposts to fairly desperate people. But of course. They were then part of the remnant, not of the ruling class.



**“The Circumcision remnant is doing nothing more exotic than holding fast to promises.”**

Clearly, the Circumcision remnant, even in the first century, is doing nothing more exotic than holding fast to promises. Peter addresses his first letter to “the chosen expatriates of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia.” Have the

expatriates in these cities “already become a channel of blessing” (Jewish blessing) during the administration of God’s grace, which was already then imposed via Paul? The very description of these folks as “expatriates” defies any such understanding.

The entire book of Hebrews, especially chapter 11, is written to geographical and spiritual expatriates (Hebrews 11:13). Even in that early day, Israel was a people in waiting. They had seen the kingdom withdraw to an undetermined time in the future on the heels of the new administration inaugurated by Paul, and now they were supposed to—*what?* Certainly not rule or reign, but rather to wait and endure. As Paul writes to them in Hebrews 10:35-39—

You should not, then, be casting away your boldness, which is having a great reward, for you have need of endurance that, doing the will of God, you should be requited with the promise. For still how very little, He Who is coming will be arriving and not delaying. Now, My “just one by faith shall be living,” and “If he should ever be shrinking, My soul is not delighting in him.” Yet we are not of those shrinking back to destruction, but of faith for the procuring of the soul.

That Paul instructs Israel to exercise faith proves that Israel has not yet come into the promises, or any semblance of them. Faith is “a conviction concerning matters which are *not* being observed” (Hebrews 11:1).

#### THE CASE OF ELIJAH

The qualification of the remnant in Elijah’s day, cited here in Romans by Paul, was simply that, “I left for Myself seven thousand men who do not bow the knee to the image of Baal.” Where is the implication that anyone among such a company was “already [becoming] a channel of blessing” in the national sense? It simply implies—states, rather—that there were people in Israel who did not bow the knee to the false god Baal. Not very fancy attainments there, but certainly enough to be called a remnant. The logical conclusion is that the remnant, having avoided the premier false deity of the day (Baal), was yet faithful to the true God. In Elijah’s day, this meant the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On the heels of this, Paul writes, “*Thus*, then, in the current era also, there has come to be a remnant according to the choice of grace.” The presence of “*thus*” in this sentence tells us that the remnant of the current era believes *in the same manner* as the remnant of Elijah’s

day; in spite of opposition, they still hold true to God's promises. That these promises could be anything but the promises made to Abraham flies in the face of not only context but common sense.

### “GRACE”

That “there has come to be a remnant according to the choice of grace” could tempt some into thinking that this must be an Uncircumcision remnant, for isn't grace the keynote of Paul's gospel? Yes, but Paul's is a message of the “*transcendent* grace of God” (2 Corinthians 9:14), as opposed to the regular kind of grace which had been around a long time.

The Greek word translated “grace” in the New Testament is *charis*. This word and its various forms occurs seventy-nine times in the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament. Grace is no stranger to divine writings outside of Paul's. Here are some notable Old Testament examples—

- ▶ “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8).
- ▶ “Grace is poured upon Your lips” (Psalm 45:2).
- ▶ “The Lord will give grace and glory” (Psalm 84:11).
- ▶ “[Esther] obtained grace and favor” (Esther 2:17).
- ▶ “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be *gracious* to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

It was an act of the grace of God that kept anyone in Israel—subsequent to the coming of Paul's evangel and the temporary withdrawal of the kingdom—from abandoning the Circumcision promises.

### THE CURRENT ERA

An era is defined in the Greek-English Keyword Concordance of the CLNT as “a distinct portion of time having special characteristics.” What portion of time did Paul mean when he wrote “the current era” in Romans 11:5? What were the special characteristics of that portion? Wouldn't it be helpful if we could discover that Paul used this phrase “current era” elsewhere? Then we could investigate these other places and understand, from the context, what Paul had in mind when he used this phrase. Even better if Paul used the phrase in this very letter. Wouldn't that be

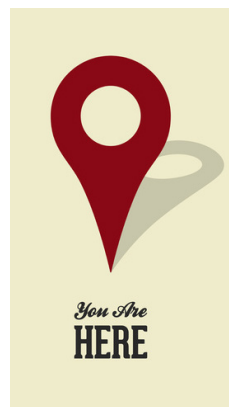
something? Well, I have great news for you. Paul uses the phrase “current era” only three times in all of his letters—and *all three times are here in Romans*. If we can identify the time period of the current era in these other two places (besides Romans 11:5) *in this very letter*, then I would insist that anyone wishing to make the “current era” of Romans 11:5 anything different from the other two “current eras” has an agenda other than discovering truth. I now print these other two passages in context—

#### ▶ Romans 3:24-28

Being justified gratuitously in His grace, through the deliverance which is in Christ Jesus 25 (Whom God purposed for a Propitiatory shelter, through faith in His blood, for a display of His righteousness because of the passing over of the penalties of sins which occurred before in the forbearance of God), 26 toward the display of His righteousness *in the current era*, for Him to be just and a Justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus. 27 Where, then, is boasting? It is debarred! Through what law? 28 Of works? No! But through faith's law. For we are reckoning a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law.

#### ▶ Romans 8:16-18

The spirit itself is testifying together with our spirit that we are children of God. 17 Yet if children, enjoyers also of an allotment, enjoyers, indeed, of an allotment from God, yet joint enjoyers of Christ's allotment, if so be that we are suffering together, that we should be glorified together also. 18 For I am reckoning that the sufferings of *the current era* do not deserve the glory about to be revealed for us.



In the first passage, Romans 3:24-28, “the current era” is the time during which Christ 1) displays His righteousness, 2) justifies ones who are of His faith, 3) operates by means of faith, and 4) justifies a human by faith, apart from works of law. In the second passage, Romans 8:16-18, the “current era” is the time during which holders of an allotment from God suffer.

Before I take you back to Romans 11:15, tell me if you think that any of these characteristics of “the current era,” listed above, died with Paul. Is not Christ still displaying His righteousness in the lives of members of His body? Are we not still justified? Are

we not still holding on to our call by faith? During this time of Israel's casting away, are we not still justified by faith apart from works of law? Have any of us with an allotment from God stopped suffering for the sake of that allotment? All of these things began with Paul and they have continued as long as there have been body of Christ members upon the Earth. Were Knoch to take his "limited-to-Paul's lifetime" view of "the current era" from Romans 11:5 and transplant it into these other passages, he would not only be denying a Circumcision remnant, but a body of Christ remnant as well. I would not want to cut off my nose to spite my face, yet this is just what Mr. Knoch would unwittingly accomplish should he take his understanding of "the current era" in Romans 11:5 and apply it to the same phrase in other parts of the same letter.

#### LET THERE BE LIGHT

Armed with this information, let us return to Romans 11:5. Our default setting must now be, "the current era is the era of the justification, faith, and suffering of the body of Christ, which will run its course until the body of Christ is no more upon the Earth." Does this fit the Romans 11:25 context? Perfectly. The pressing question is, "Has God thrust away His people?" The motive behind

**"God has not thrust away His people during the time in which the body of Christ is on Earth and Israel is in apostasy."**

the question is the faithlessness of Israel (she crucified her own Messiah) and the calling of the body of Christ. In light of these alarming facts, the question is more than justified: "Has God thrust away His people?" Paul's answer is more than plain: "God has not thrust away His people!" Being an ex-lawyer/Pharisee type, Paul does not leave it there. He offers proof. He references a similar time of distress, the time of Elijah. Baal-worship was so rife then that Elijah considered himself the last man standing. Surely he alone was devoted to God. God told Elijah that He had reserved to Himself 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. "Thus, then," Paul says, "in the current era



also there is a remnant according to the choice of grace."

The presence of the remnant is Paul's proof that God has not thrust away His people *during the time in which the body of Christ is on the Earth and Israel is in apostasy*. This time period is still upon us. If there is no remnant during this unique time period, then anyone could accuse God of having thrust away His people. The remnant can only exist during the time of Israel's national apostasy and the nations' blessing. When the body of Christ is snatched away, the existence of a remnant becomes moot because God will have taken up again with Israel. As Paul writes in Romans 11:25—

For I am not willing for you to be ignorant of this secret, brethren, lest you may be passing for prudent among yourselves, that callousness, in part, on Israel has come, until the complement of the nations may be entering.

The callousness of Israel exists contemporaneously with the presence, on Earth, of the body of Christ. Only when the body of Christ is removed from Earth does God remove the callousness from Israel. The phrase "callousness, *in part*" allows for the remnant. The whole nation is not calloused. By the grace of God, the remnant escapes this fate. Therein lay the vital importance of the two-word phrase, "in part." As long as there is a body of Christ upon the Earth, then there will be a Circumcision remnant among Israel. It is the presence of the body of Christ that casts doubt upon God's Israel-based intentions. Our very presence here behooves God to continually testify that He has not forgotten Israel. He does not leave Himself without testimony, without witnesses. The testimony and the witness is a Circumcision remnant. Paul explains the result of the removal of the body of Christ in the following verse, verse 26—

And thus all Israel shall be saved, *according as it is written*, Arriving out of Zion shall be the Rescuer. He will be turning away irreverence from Jacob.

The salvation of the context is an "according-as-it-is-written" salvation. This can be none other than a fulfillment of the ancient promises God made to Israel. These promises are the *topic du jour* in Romans 11. The remnant never forsake the promises.

The rest come later. —MZ

(Next week: "The people of the current era.")