

"THE GOD OF HOPELESS CAUSES AND IMPOSSIBLE ODDS"

(Romans 11:1-29)

(Chuck Swindoll)

The Lord chose the Hebrew descendants of Abraham to be His covenant people. He made an unconditional promise to give them a vast stretch of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River, bordered on the south by Egypt and stretching as far north as Assyria (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18; Deut. 1:7-8; Josh. 1:4). He promised to bless the Hebrew people and then bless the whole world through them. But they rebelled. The Jews rejected His covenant in favor of man-made religion. Consequently, the rejection of the Jews would appear to place God's covenant in jeopardy. After all, how can a righteous God reward sin by blessing unrighteous people? Yet if God does not fulfill His promises, He can no longer be called righteous.

Some have tried to resolve this apparent conundrum by suggesting that the body of believers (also known as "the church") has replaced the nation of Israel and stands to inherit the blessings of Abraham's covenant. In other words, the "spiritual descendants of Abraham" will receive the covenant blessings instead of Abraham's physical descendants. To support this claim, one must no longer interpret the Bible in a straightforward manner. At the very least, the reader must mentally replace "Israel" with "church." Then, interpreting the book of Revelation (not to mention other sections of Scripture) becomes almost impossible.

Paul offered another, more sensible approach. First, he rejected the notion that the majority of rebellious Jews represented the true Israel (Rom. 11:1-6). Unlike a democracy in which a majority vote defines the nation, a theocracy is defined by the will of God. Those who rebel—even if they can claim superior numbers—are not the true Israel. God calls the faithful few a "remnant."

Second, God has neither forgotten nor forsaken His covenant people. They have merely been set aside for a time. The Jews have not been punished; they are under discipline (11:7-14). And at some future date, the remnant will arise and claim all that God has promised the nation of Israel.

Paul's explanation highlights two principles that apply to everyone, not just Abraham's descendants.

First, *unlike humanity, God does His best work through a remnant, a faithful minority.* The Bible is filled with examples of how God deliberately stacked the odds against Himself in order to reassure His people. He led the Israelites out of Egypt and into a wilderness where no water could be found, only to provide water miraculously (Exod. 17:1-7)- He instructed Gideon to whittle his army down to a three-hundred-man strike force, only to rout a



massive enemy army on their behalf (Judg. 7:19-25). In Elijah's standoff with the 450 prophets of Baal, God instructed Elijah to douse the altar until the sacrifice was soaked and water ran down the stones and stood in the trench. Baal, the fictitious god of lightning and thunder, couldn't generate so much as a spark, but fire from heaven consumed Elijah's sacrifice, the water, the altar, and a good portion of the ground (1 Kgs. 18:25-38)!

You may find yourself facing an impossible situation, a hopeless cause. The odds against you may be humanly overwhelming. Moreover, you may be asking yourself, "Where did I go wrong? What did I do to bring this upon myself?" The answer could quite possibly be "Nothing!" The world may have conspired against Jesus forewarned (John 15:18-19)—only to give God an opportunity to demonstrate His desire to bless you.

You may be in a holding pattern right now, enduring an unproductive season, unable to accomplish anything. You may feel like you have been benched in the game of life, set aside, forsaken. Or you may find yourself standing alone against an unjust majority. God still delights to accomplish good through a faithful remnant. Remain steadfast in what you know to be right.

Second, *unlike humanity, God always keeps His promises.* Ours is a dishonest generation. Precious few can be trusted. Wedding vows are broken. Contracts mean little. The courts are overloaded with endless broken promises to settle. Counseling offices struggle to mend broken hearts because of broken promises. Men and women of integrity are increasingly hard to find. Nevertheless, God will never fail to keep His promises. He will keep His promises to the Jews and He will keep His promises to us.

My mother had a wonderful habit of putting together handwritten "promise books" for people who were enduring difficult circumstances. When she encountered someone grieving the loss of a family member, struggling to survive a broken marriage, battling poverty, or fighting through depression, she would prepare a little notebook with carefully printed verses of Scripture containing God's promises. What a wonderful gift to give someone who needs encouragement. What a wonderful gift to give yourself if you are facing a hopeless cause or overrun by impossible odds.

Let me also encourage you to be careful with the word "promise," especially with your children. Make "promise" a precious and rare term in your vocabulary around the house, uttered only as a sacred pledge to bring your deeds into line with your words. Resolve to teach your own children that God can be relied upon to fulfill His promises by faithfully honoring your own.