

Stumble, Fall, Diminish

Romans 11:11—12

Acts is often characterized as a book documenting the rise of the church. It is probably more accurate to say that it chronicles the fall of the nation of Israel and the fate of individual Israelites. Acts begins with believers excited about the promised Kingdom being set up. Many are brought into the Little Flock of believers with the understanding that the Kingdom was “at hand.” This message was first preached by John the Baptist, then Jesus Christ and then the Disciples (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Those who believed in the name of Jesus Christ, that he was Israel’s Messiah, became members of the Little Flock. This remnant of Israel grew quickly in the early chapters of Acts under Peter’s preaching. His message stayed the same as from the beginning, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, and show your faith genuine by repenting of putting Him to death, and then being baptized (Acts 2:38). If the nation (the religious leaders of Israel) came to believe, then the believing nation could look forward to entering the Kingdom when Israel is restored to her rightful place in the world (Acts 3:19).

So, what does the above paragraph have to do with Romans 11? Paul has been speaking to Israel in Romans 9 and 10, and then finishes up in chapter 11 by addressing her future. He shows why prophecy fulfillment has been put on hold by explaining Israel’s stumble, fall and diminishing (loss).

Nation or Individual

It is necessary to keep in mind whether the focus is the nation of Israel, or individuals within Israel are being talked about. God formed the nation of Israel, planted her in the land, gave her all the prophets, the promises, the temple service, Scripture, and even Jesus Christ (Romans 9:4). God’s promises usually dealt with the nation of Israel, even though He gave them to individuals. If the nation obeyed God, He blessed Israel. If Israel turned away from God, the whole nation was judged and punished. This can be understood by thinking of the United States. Although individuals comprise the nation, it is the leaders who define the nation. Although the majority of people don’t believe we should allow abortion, the United States allows it. Although the majority of individuals support Israel, our nation has turned away from supporting Israel at times. The same is true of the nation of Israel. When David was king of Israel, the nation prospered because David was a man after God’s own heart. When evil kings rose to power, God judged their evil actions by punishing the entire nation.

The nation of Israel was promised not only entrance into the Kingdom, but also that they would play a prominent role in leadership over the Gentile nations. When the religious leaders of the nation of Israel refused to point the people to their Messiah, God worked around them and began growing a righteous nation of believers, the Little Flock of Luke 12:32. This new nation supplanted the original reprobate nation that had turned away from God (Matthew 21:43).

Stumble

Israel’s stumble goes back to the time of Christ. The builders of Israel, the religious leaders, had mistakenly taken the nation as their own when it was actually given to them by God for them to nurture the people, and lead them to Him. Their ultimate task was to lead the nation to bear fruit. Their lack of proper leadership had been going on for years (Jeremiah 10:21; 12:10). Israel had become such a reprobate nation that very few even recognized their Messiah when He came the first time. The religious leaders were actually leading people away from their Messiah instead of bringing the people to Him.

Jesus Christ is called the Cornerstone because He is the most critical component of a proper spiritual foundation (1 Peter 2:6). The builders (religious leaders) did not recognize Jesus Christ as their Corner-

stone, and they thought that they finally rid themselves of the troublemaker, Jesus, when they put Him to death. This was a stumble on the part of the religious elites (Acts 4:10—11). Even though they stumbled over the Cornerstone, they did so out of ignorance and were given another chance at redemption (Luke 23:34; Acts 3:17; Numbers 15:22—31).

Fall

After stumbling over the stone of stumbling (Jesus Christ), the nation of Israel was given another opportunity to repent and come back to God. This is what Peter's sermon is all about in Acts 3:19. Israel needed to repent of the sin of killing their Messiah, and return to God in order for the times of refreshing and restitution of all things to happen (Acts 3:20—21).

Unfortunately, although many individuals believed, the leaders of Israel remained obstinate and stiff-necked by rejecting the Holy Spirit, who was speaking through Stephen (Acts 7:51, 55). That was a defining moment for Israel because it was with that event that the offer of the Kingdom was removed, and Israel was moved from a place of honor to one of dishonor (Romans 9:19—24). Instead of using Israel to reveal God to the world, God would begin using the Church, the Body of Christ. Instead of being "My people," Israel was declared "Not My people" by God. Israel had suffered a major fall.

The Greek word behind the English word *fall* can also be translated as trespass or sin (Strong's G3900). In this case they sinned (fell) intentionally, and there was no sacrifice to cover an intentional sin. The same Greek word is used to describe Adam's fall in Romans 5:15. Just as Adam's sin caused mankind's fall, the religious leaders' sin caused the nation of Israel to fall. In like manner, just as Adam was given hope that His fall was not the end for him and for all of mankind, Paul gave the nation of Israel hope of a future.

Note how some translations of the Bible use the English word *fall* twice in Romans 11:11. This can be confusing and masks that there are actually two different Greek words being used. The other use of the word *fall* means to perish, to come to an end, to disappear or cease (Strong's G4098). Israel, however, will be given a chance to recover. They did not stumble that they should come to an end.

Diminish

Going back to the Greek, the word used in Romans 11:12 to describe Israel after their fall can mean to decrease or suffer loss. Their condition is emphasized in Romans 11:15 where they are said to be cast off, which can also mean to have suffered loss (see Acts 27:22, used as in loss of life). In verse 12, Israel's fall brought riches for the world (the reconciliation of verse 15), and their diminishing brought riches for the Gentiles. This means their diminishing would have happened quickly at their fall since the riches came to the world at a point in time, not over a long period. If the diminishing of verse 12 happened over the next 15—20 years, then it would seem that the riches for the Gentiles would also occur over that same period. Israel's fall happened when they were cut off of the olive tree (Romans 11:17) and their diminishing would be the loss they suffered because of their fall. Israel did not have a slow diminishing decline in God's program. They were quickly cut off and they suffered loss when they blasphemed the Holy Spirit at the stoning of Stephen. However, God, in His grace and mercy, made sure that Paul made it a priority to reach out to individual Israelites with the Gospel of Grace (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46). Israel's diminishing seems to be the loss of position they experienced at their fall, which happened quickly rather than over many years. Paul's need to make individual Israelites a priority did diminish and come to an end by Acts 28 as he traveled through modern day Turkey, Greece and Rome.

I realize that this goes against many mid-Acts teachers. This is why it is important for every believer not to follow a particular teacher, but to study Scripture individually to see what is actually happening.

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