

*Does God Have
A Future for Israel?*

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A STUDY OF ROMANS 11

Does God Have a Future for Israel?: A Study of Romans 11

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C O N T E N T S

Introduction	7
Chapter 1	13
<i>Proof God Has Not Rejected Israel</i>	
Chapter 2	23
<i>The Reason for Israel's Unbelief</i>	
Chapter 3	29
<i>Warnings Against Gentile Pride</i>	
Chapter 4	39
<i>Israel's Future Salvation</i>	
Conclusion	47

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Does God have a future for national Israel? As a pastor, I have seen many people become confused on this very issue. This confusion, though, is unfortunate, for the Bible is actually very clear on this matter. The Old and New Testaments reveal in absolute terms that God has a glorious plan for His people Israel. This plan is based on unconditional promises He made with them that cannot be broken. Though Israel is in a current state of rebellion, God is not done with them. Since God keeps His promises, what He has vowed will come to pass. That means Israel has a glorious future to come.

Why all the confusion?

As I have talked with people who deny Israel has a future in the plan of God, I often find that many of them have been influenced by the writings of those who hold to Covenant theology. Those who hold to Covenant theology believe that God has rejected Israel and that the Church has replaced Israel in the plan of God. They hold that God's promises to Israel concerning a national restoration and a land to live in will not come to pass. They believe these promises have been forfeited because of disobedience or transferred spiritually to the Church.

I do affirm that many who have written from this perspective were godly men who wrote many good things. But we must not forget that they were confused on issues relating to Israel and the Church. They did not write from a dispensational perspective that keeps the biblical distinction between Israel and the Church. As a result, when these men address issues concerning Israel, their

conclusions are often in error. That is why we must be discerning when reading the works of those men.

Principles for staying on track

Though we will be looking at many passages related to Israel's future, the focus of this study is Romans 11. It is in this chapter that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, directly addresses Israel's future role in God's plan. It is also here that he unequivocally reaffirms that God's promises to Israel will come to pass. It is here that we are told in absolute terms, "God has not rejected His people."

As we approach this issue, there are three principles that will help us come to correct conclusions. First, we must keep our hermeneutics simple and take the Bible for what it says. Hermeneutics deals with how we interpret the Bible. If we interpret Scripture literally, in accord with the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, we will stay on track. God meant for His Word to be understood, and we will avoid much confusion if we simply accept what He is saying at face value.

Second, in our study, we must keep the biblical distinction between Israel and the Church. In the Bible, "Israel" means Israel and "Church" means the Church. Of all the references to "Israel" and the "Church" in the Bible, the two are never interchanged or used synonymously. Though Israel and the Church have similarities, there are also many differences. Israel is a nation that descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Church is made up of many nationalities and was born on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. If we keep these two groups distinct, as the Bible does, we will not get confused.

Third, we must understand that some of God's purposes are established and unchanging. This is certainly true of His plans for Israel. This is important because the age we live in, the Church age, is characterized by Gentile salvation. Though some Jews have come to Christ, it is mostly Gentiles who are being saved. This era of Gentile salvation, however, does not mean God is done with Israel. As Romans 11 will show, after God has completed His program with the Gentiles, He will resume and complete His program with Israel.

Overview of God's plan for Israel

God's plan for Israel was laid out in the Old Testament. According to Daniel 9:24-27, God has a seventy-week (or 490-year) program for Israel. Sixty-nine of these weeks (or 483 years) have already been fulfilled. One week, or seven-year period, is left to be accomplished. This seven-year period, which we call the Tribulation, will begin after the Rapture of the Church. During the Tribulation, God will pour out His wrath on an unbelieving world and resume His program with Israel. During this time, He will bring Israel to repentance and belief in Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus Christ will come again and establish His earthly kingdom when Israel believes. It is in this kingdom that God will fulfill all the covenant promises He made with Israel in the Old Testament.

Summary of Romans 1-10

Before we look at the specifics of Romans 11, it is necessary to summarize what Paul has written up to this point in the book of Romans.

Romans 1-8

In the first three chapters, Paul declares that all people have sinned and are guilty before God. In chapters four and five, he discusses how salvation is by faith alone and how all who believe in Jesus Christ are declared righteous before God. Chapters six and seven tell how sin no longer has mastery over the believer. In chapter eight, Paul shows how God's sovereign work of election guarantees that believers are eternally secure.

Romans 9-11

It is in Chapters 9-11 that Paul specifically addresses Israel's place in the plan of God. Some have thought that chapters 9-11 are a change in subject from what Paul had been talking about previously in the first eight chapters. This, however, is not so. Chapters 9-11 flow logically from what Paul laid out in chapters 1-8. If Paul is correct that God will fulfill His salvation plan with those He has elected, the issue of Israel's future naturally comes to mind. If God's electing purposes are true, what about Israel? They were elected by God.

What about all the promises and covenants He made with them in the Old Testament?

In chapters 9-11, Paul answers these questions and shows that God will keep His promises with Israel. They, as His people, have a glorious future and are still within the scope of His salvation provided in Jesus Christ. Even in a current state of unbelief and after the beginning of the Church age, Israel is still seen as the current possessor of “the covenants” and “the promises” God made with them in the Old Testament (see Romans 9:4).

This glorious future awaiting Israel, though, in no way excuses them for their terrible sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. In chapter 10, Paul demonstrates that Israel is responsible for their failure to believe the Gospel: “But as for Israel He says, ‘ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE’ ” (Romans 10:21).

God had been good to Israel. He sent the Messiah to them; but instead of accepting Him, they became hard-hearted and killed Him. The nation God chose for Himself became characterized by stubbornness and obstinance. Israel’s failure, however, opened the door for Gentile salvation. As Romans 10:20 states, “I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO SOUGHT ME NOT, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.” This is a reference to Gentile salvation.

At the end of chapter 10, then, a strange dilemma had occurred. The Jews, who were God’s chosen people, had rejected their Messiah, while the Gentiles, who previously did not have access to God’s covenant blessings, found salvation. How does all of this tie in with God’s salvation plan?

The rejection of the Gospel by Israel and the salvation of Gentiles mentioned at the end of chapter 10 brings up some important questions that Paul now addresses in chapter 11. Is God done with Israel as a nation? Is there a new Israel—the Church? Are the promises to Israel in the Old Testament now transferred to the Church?

In chapter 11, Paul strongly rejects the idea that God is done with Israel. In fact, he shows that God is still graciously dealing with them, and a future time is coming when He will save and restore them in fulfillment of His covenant promises.

C H A P T E R O N E

Proof God Has Not Rejected Israel ***(Romans 11:1-10)***

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." AND DAVID SAYS, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER" (Romans 11:1-10).

Can God Reject Israel? (Romans 11:1)

Chapter 11 begins with a question; **I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He?** In light of Israel's stubborn rejection of Jesus Christ, Paul asks the question, "Has God rejected Israel?" The answer to this question is strong and emphatic: **May it never be!** This phrase, **may it never be!** (*me genoito* in Greek), expresses denial in absolute terms. In fact, the King James Version translates this, "God forbid." To answer the question whether God has **rejected** Israel, Paul, in the strongest terms possible says, "No." Such a thought is impossible. Even the question itself implies a negative answer.

Old Testament proof

This powerful affirmation that God has not rejected Israel verifies what God had already revealed in the Old Testament. In fact, those familiar with the Old Testament would already know this. First Samuel 12 is one passage that speaks of God's unconditional commitment to Israel. In this chapter, the prophet Samuel addressed the people of Israel who, at that time, had sinned greatly against God by desiring a king like the other nations. They were afraid for their lives because of the evil they had committed. Notice, though, what Samuel told the nation of Israel on that day, "For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself" (1 Samuel 12:22). It was because of God's "great name" that He did not abandon Israel. It is significant that this promise came in the context of the disobedience of the nation. They had sinned greatly, but God would "not abandon His people." The same holds true today.

Psalm 94:14 also affirms God's commitment to Israel, "For the Lord will not abandon His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance." Israel is the people referred to in this verse. God will never "forsake" or "abandon" them. If we take God at His Word, we can safely conclude that there will never come a time when God will abandon Israel for good.

Jeremiah 31 is another passage that clearly shows God's commitment to Israel. It is significant that Jeremiah was written in the context of Israel's apostasy. The southern tribes of Israel had so

disobeyed the Lord that they were about to be taken captive by the Babylonians. One would think that if God were ever going to forsake Israel it would have been at this time. But notice what the Lord had to say concerning Israel's status before Him:

Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day, And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs from before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jeremiah 31:35-36).

To show the certainty of Israel's continued existence as God's people, the Lord used an example from the created order. Israel's place in the plan of God is as sure as the order of the created universe. Does the fixed order of the universe still exist? Do the sun, moon and stars still operate? They certainly do. And since they do, we can be assured that God has not abandoned Israel. Jeremiah 31:37 also says:

Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done," declares the LORD.

We should especially appreciate this statement in light of today's modern technology. The universe is so vast, it is impossible for any human to fully measure it. Just as impossible is the idea that Israel could ever become so unfaithful that God would cast them away and not fulfill His covenant with them. Could God state any more clearly that He will never reject Israel?

In spite of these clear passages, however, some still remain confused on this matter. Some think that since God has entered into a relationship with the Church, His promises to national Israel have been transferred to the Church. The people Paul is referring to in Romans 11:1, however, is clearly the nation Israel. *Israel* is the people He will not abandon. *Israel* is the inheritance He will not forsake. Israel cannot be taken to mean the Church.

We should thank God for this truth that God will not abandon Israel. In the Church today, Christians have also become His inheritance and His people. But that does not make the Church the new Israel. God's promises to Israel should be an encouragement to us.

Since God is faithful to them, we can be sure that He will keep His promises to the Church.

In Romans 11:1b, Paul continues with why he believes God will honor His Word to Israel: **For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.** As part of the proof that God has not rejected Israel, he uses himself as an example. Paul was a Jew. He was a physical **descendant of Abraham** and a member **of the tribe of Benjamin.** As a Jew, Paul believed God would honor His Word.

Israel: The Chosen Nation (Romans 11:2a)

As verse two begins, Paul says, **God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.** For the second time in two verses, Paul gives an explicit statement addressing Israel's status before God. If we did not get the point in verse one, we better get it in verse two. As I read what Paul says, I wonder how Scripture could be any clearer on this subject. I also wonder how people can become so confused on this issue. Yet two thousand years after Paul wrote Romans, many people are saying that God has rejected Israel. As one Bible teacher wrote,

It may seem harsh to say that, "God is through with the Jews." But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group. . . . That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church.¹

This statement is a denial of Scripture. One must wonder if this writer ever studied Romans 11:1-2. As I read the works of men like this who say that God is done with Israel, I end up asking myself, "How do they end up with that interpretation?"

Notice also in verse two that Israel, **His people**, are the **people whom He foreknew.** The term **foreknew** refers to a "choosing beforehand." It is not just knowing something ahead of time. In Amos 3:2, God spoke to the sons of Israel saying, "You only have I *chosen* among all the families of the earth" (emphasis mine). The word "chosen" literally means "known." Amos 3:2 literally reads, "You only have I known among all the families of the earth." It goes without saying that God knew about Israel, for God knows everything. More is meant here than that. What Amos 3:2 teaches is that God "knew"

¹ Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), pp. 89-90.

Israel in an intimate sense—He chose them before they even existed.

The term, **foreknew**, that Paul uses here in reference to Israel is the same word He used in Romans 8:29 when referring to the salvation and security of believers: “For those whom He *foreknew*, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (emphasis mine). It is ironic that many who strongly stand for the security of the believer’s salvation based on God’s foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 do not see Israel’s standing as secure before God when the same word is used in Romans 11:2. But just as God’s choosing of believers means their salvation is secure, so also God’s choosing of Israel means that their place in the plan of God is fixed. The fact that Israel is foreknown by God guarantees they will not be rejected by Him.

Proof From the Remnant (Romans 11:2b-6)

In Romans 11:1b, Paul showed that his conversion as a Jew was evidence that God had not rejected Israel. He was part of the believing remnant that God was keeping until the salvation of the nation took place (see Romans 11:25-26). In a similar way in Romans 11:2b-4, Paul uses another example from the Old Testament, the account of Elijah from 1 Kings 19:10-14, to show that God has not rejected Israel:

Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.” But what is the divine response to him? “I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL” (Romans 11:2b-4).

During a time of great spiritual apostasy in **Israel**, the prophet **Elijah** thought that he was the only one who had stayed faithful to God. God showed him, though, that he was not the only one, for there were **seven thousand men** who had not **bowed the knee to Baal**.” These **seven thousand** believers would have been a small percentage of the nation as a whole. In fact, this believing remnant would have comprised under one percent of the nation’s total population. **Elijah**, though, was not to underestimate the significance of these **seven thousand men**. **Seven thousand**, though only a small

remnant, is much more than one. Even during this dark time in Israel's history, God was working and preserving a remnant for Himself.

Paul draws the connection between Elijah's day and his own in verse five: **In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.** Paul's point is this: just as God had preserved a **remnant** of believing Jews during Elijah's day, so too, God has kept a **remnant** of believing Jews during his day. This present **remnant** shows that God is not done with Israel.

National and individual election

When discussing God's election or choosing of Israel, two distinctions need to be understood. First, there is *national* election. As we saw in Amos 3:2, God chose Israel above all the nations of the earth. In fact, he chose Israel before they even existed as a nation. This national election does not mean that every single Jew within the elect nation is saved, but the nation as a whole has been chosen.

This unique status of Israel as God's chosen nation must be kept separate from what God has planned for other nations. For example, though God has blessed the United States of America, the United States is not God's chosen nation. As Americans, we should be thankful for the many blessings we have, but make no mistake—the United States is not God's chosen nation. Nor can the United States claim promises God made to Israel. Israel is unique. It is the only nation that has ever been chosen by God.

Second, in addition to Israel's national election, there is the election of *individual Jews* within the nation. It is these elect Jews who experience God's spiritual salvation. Paul refers to these elect Jews in Romans 9:6-7 when he says, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants." Though Israel is an elect nation, being a part of that elect nation does not mean a Jew is automatically saved. Many Jews in Paul's day thought they were saved simply because they were physical descendants of Abraham. True Jews, however, are not only physical descendants of Abraham, they are also believers in Christ.

Israel's election based on grace

In Romans 11:6, Paul declares that God's gracious choice of Israel is based on His grace: **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.** God's choice (or election) of Israel is based entirely on **grace** and not **works**. This statement is significant because many Christians today believe God is done with Israel because of their unfaithfulness. They say Israel was God's people, but because of their continual disobedience He has cast them off for good. But according to Romans 11:6, Israel's election was not based on **works**. It was based on **grace**.

Surprisingly, many who deny Israel's future in the plan of God are often the most adamant about individual eternal security based on God's grace. This is inconsistent, though. If a person understands God's **grace** in individual election, he should not have a problem understanding Israel's secure position. Yet many who stand strongest for God's **grace** and sovereignty with individual election believe that God has rejected Israel because of their unfaithfulness. Israel's election, however, was never based on **works** to begin with.

Grace and **works** are mutually exclusive—they do not go together. God's choice of individuals or Israel as a nation has nothing to do with works, otherwise it would not be an election of **grace**. The belief that God is done with Israel because they were unfaithful confuses not only the area of the end times, but it also confuses the issue of God's sovereignty and what it means to be God's elect.

Israel's Present Hardening (Romans 11:7-10)

In verses 7-10, Paul discusses the reason why Israel is in a current state of unbelief. He begins by saying, **What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened** (Romans 11:7).

What did **Israel** seek that they did not **obtain**, and what does it mean that they were **hardened**? Concerning the first issue, it was salvation by works that Israel sought to attain. **Israel** tried to become righteous by keeping the Law instead of believing by faith. In Romans 9:32, Paul addressed why the Jews were not saved: "Because they did not pursue it [salvation] by faith, but as though it were by works." He also said, "they have a zeal for God, but not in

accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2-3).

The New Testament teaches that salvation is by faith alone and not by works of the Law. Israel, however, tried to become saved by keeping the Law. They tried to become righteous without faith and as a result they failed.

What does Israel's hardening refer to? The term, **hardened**, is a medical word and means a callus. A callus is what forms around a fracture when a bone is broken. When a callus forms, that part of the body loses feeling and becomes insensitive. Hardening, in the sense Paul uses here, means a callousness to the truth of God—an insensitivity to what He has revealed. The hardening of Israel (or individuals) does not mean God causes them to sin, but He does give them over to their sinful desires (see Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Biblical truth influences people in two ways. It can have a softening effect on the heart if received but a hardening effect if rejected. If people do not receive the truth, they will eventually become hardened to it. That is why it is so important to accept the Word when it is proclaimed.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 states that Christians give off a fragrance for Christ, an aroma that affects both those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To unbelievers, Christians are "an aroma from death to death," but to those being saved, "an aroma from life to life." Every time we give forth the Word of God, God's purposes are accomplished. That is just as true in the lives of those who are hardened in their opposition to the Gospel as it is with those who accept the Gospel. As a pastor, I have seen people sit under the teaching of the Word for years and yet refuse to believe in Christ. They become so hardened to the truth that they no longer are convicted by it. It is a frightening thing, though, to be exposed to God's truth and not submit to it, because that often leads to further hardening. Statistics show how rare it is for people to believe the Gospel later on in life. As people grow older, they become progressively hardened and set in their ways.

Israel's hardening took place because they would not believe in Jesus. For three years He proclaimed Himself as Israel's Messiah, but the more He taught, the stronger their opposition to Him became. The progressive hardening that took place in the nation

became so great that the leaders eventually resorted to murdering the Son of God. In Israel's case, their refusal resulted in a judicial hardening, but even then that hardening is only partial and only for a limited time (see Romans 11:25).

Concerning this hardening of Israel, Paul said: just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY" (Romans 11:8). Paul combines quotations from Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. A **spirit of stupor** is a state of insensitivity toward spiritual things. That is what happened to Israel.

And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER" (Romans 11:9-10).

Verse nine is a quotation from Psalm 69:22. A **table** is supposed to be a place of blessing and nourishment; but for Israel their table became a **snare and a trap**. Their **eyes** became **darkened** and their **backs** became bowed under the continual burden and terror of the situation they put themselves in.

C H A P T E R T W O

The Reason for Israel's Unbelief (Romans 11:11-15)

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too (Romans 11:11-15).

One of the amazing truths about God is that He is able to take the sinful actions of men and use them for good. This is truly the case with Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ. As we will see in Romans 11:11-15, God used the rebellion of Israel to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

Israel's Fall Not Permanent (Romans 11:11a)

In the first part of verse eleven, Paul says, **I say then, they [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be.** Again, as in Romans 11:1 and 11:2, Paul in absolute terms affirms that God

is not done with Israel. The **may it never be** shows the impossibility of that ever occurring. If God rejected Israel, that would be a violation of His character since God is not able to break His promises.

The Purpose for Israel's Fall (11:11b)

As mentioned, one of the great things about God's sovereignty is that He is able to use the sinful acts of men to accomplish good. In this case, God used the sin of Israel to bring salvation to the Gentiles: **But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous** (Romans 11:11b). The **transgression** of Israel was their refusal to believe in Christ. But because of this sin something good has occurred, for now **salvation has come to the Gentiles**.

In Paul's day, Gentile salvation was not an easy concept for Jews to grasp. Before the time of Christ, **Gentiles** were described as those who were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:11). The Old Testament does tell of some **Gentiles** who were saved, but they were saved by becoming proselytes to Judaism. As a whole, **Gentiles** were shut out from God's salvation. But with the Church age, those "who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). It was Israel's rejection of Christ that opened this door.

Jewish rejection/Gentile salvation

We see this idea of Jewish rejection opening the door for Gentile salvation in other portions of Scripture. While in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were preaching when they faced opposition from some Jews:

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:44-46).

Here the unbelief of Israel opened the door of opportunity for the

Gentiles who now had the Gospel carried to them. A similar occurrence happened in Acts 18:5-6:

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles."

In Romans 1:16, Paul also stated, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The **transgression** of Israel led to the rejection of Christ and eventually His crucifixion. As a result, the Gospel door opened to the **Gentiles**, and God is now focusing His attention on them. This does not mean Jews are not being saved, but during this age, the Church is primarily made up of **Gentiles**.

Making Israel jealous

Gentile salvation is not an end in itself. It has a purpose, and that purpose is to make Israel **jealous**. More will be said about this in verse fourteen, but when the Jews saw **Gentiles** receiving blessings that rightfully belonged to them, Paul hoped the Jews would be stirred to belief.

Israel's Salvation to Bring World Blessings (Romans 11:12-16)

Paul knew of the great blessings that came to the world as a result of Israel's rejection. In this age, Christians have the Holy Spirit within them and experience forgiveness of sins. These are wonderful benefits. But even with these great blessings being experienced in this age, Paul also knew that even greater blessings await the world.

As verse twelve says, **Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!** Because of Israel's failure to believe in the Messiah, the **riches** of God's salvation have been poured out upon the **Gentiles**. That has brought great blessings to the **world**.

But as Paul shows, there are more blessings to come. If God could bring such rich blessings to the **world** by the sin and failure of Israel, just imagine what blessings will come to the world when Israel is converted! When Israel believes, the kingdom of God will come to earth and Jesus Christ will be present on this earth. There will also be great physical blessings along with spiritual blessings. That should thrill our souls. As Christians, we should eagerly long for the salvation of Israel, because when that happens, we will rule and reign with Jesus Christ in His kingdom.

Israel is never out of God's plan. Even when His focus is on Gentile salvation, God still has a plan for their salvation. We also see in this section that Israel never loses their identity as Israel. Throughout Romans 11, Gentiles remain Gentiles and Jews remain Jews.

Many theologians like to dwell on the sin and failure of Israel. But the same verse that tells of Israel's **failure** also tells of Israel's **fulfillment**. If the **failure** belongs to the nation, so does the fulfillment. When we speak of Israel's **failure**, we cannot stop there. We must also talk about their future **fulfillment** in the plan of God.

Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

In verse thirteen, Paul tells of the mission God gave him: **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry.** Paul had a special ministry to the **Gentiles**. In the book of Galatians, he stated that Peter was the apostle to the Jews, while he, himself, was the apostle to the **Gentiles** (Galatians 2:7). That does not mean Paul never preached to Jews, but his primary **ministry** was to the Gentiles.

In verse fourteen, Paul reveals his motive for preaching to the Gentiles: **if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.** It thrilled Paul's soul to see the **Gentiles** reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but there was another reason why he ministered to them. Paul wanted his ministry to **Gentiles** to stir his fellow Jews to a **jealousy** that eventually led to their salvation. He wanted Israel to see the blessings that the **Gentiles** were now experiencing by believing in the Jewish Messiah. He wanted them to notice that Jesus, the descendant of David, had become a Savior of the **Gentiles**. He wanted his Jewish brethren to see

this, be jealous and repent. In Romans 10:1 he said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." Paul had such a passion for his fellow Jews that he was even willing to be cursed on their behalf if it meant their salvation.

Israel's rejection and acceptance

In verse fifteen, Paul talks about Israel's future salvation and what that means: **For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?** Take note of the two words **rejection** and **acceptance**. I have read many commentators who like to emphasize Israel's **rejection**, but they act like the rest of the verse that tells of Israel's **acceptance** was never written. But just as Israel's **rejection** is a fact, their **acceptance** into the plan of God is also sure as well.

Some who refuse to accept the obvious meaning of this passage say there are two groups in view in verse fifteen. They say that it is national Israel that rejected Christ, but it is the "spiritual Israel," i.e. the Church, that accepts Him. This interpretation, however, is a case of bad hermeneutics. Paul, in this section, does not switch from a physical people to a spiritual people, from national Israel to the Church. Rather, the same people that rejected Christ will be the same people who accept Him. In this verse it is national Israel who rejected Him, and it will be national Israel who accepts Him. A consistent interpretation of this text must lead to this conclusion.

Anti-Jewish sentiment has been around for a long time, and unfortunately, it has often crept into the Church. The Church has often been happy to dump on Israel and emphasize their **rejection**. But the Church has not always been as eager to discuss their **acceptance**. The biblical view, though, is that Israel is still the object of God's affection and His electing grace. Based on the Bible, God will never be done with them. In fact, their **acceptance** will be **life from the dead**.

What does the phrase **life from the dead** mean? There are two possible ways this may be taken. First, it may refer to physical **life from the dead**, i.e. physical resurrection. This could be a reference to the resurrection of Old Testament saints that will take place at Christ's return and the establishment of His kingdom. It is true that when Jesus Christ comes again, Old Testament saints will physically

be raised from the dead (see Daniel 12:2).

A more probable view, though, is that Paul is referring to spiritual life. When Israel believes in Jesus as Messiah, they will pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. This interpretation has a parallel in Romans 6:13 where Paul described believers as “those alive from the dead,” obviously a reference to spiritual life. When Israel is converted, it will be a transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Israel’s Future Linked to the Patriarchs (Romans 11:16a)

In showing that Israel’s stumbling is only temporary, Paul, in verse 16a, uses the illustration of the dough: **And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also** (16a). In using this example, Paul goes back to the instructions God gave Israel when they were in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. According to Numbers 15:17-21, when the people entered the land of Canaan and reaped their first wheat harvest, they were to offer the first part of the **dough** to the Lord. This first part of the **dough** was considered **holy**. Since the first part of the **dough** was **holy** the whole batch was then considered **holy**. Even though only a fraction of the batch was set aside to the Lord, the whole loaf was deemed holy.

What connection is Paul making here? The first piece of **dough** refers to the promises God made to the Patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was with these men that the promises of God were founded. Since they were chosen by God, that assures that their descendants, the Jews, will also have a special relationship with Him as well. Romans 11:28 supports this: “From the standpoint of the gospel they [the Jews] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob].”

God’s love for the Jews is inseparably linked to His choosing of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Since the first piece of **dough**—the Patriarchs, belonged to God, the rest of the lump—the descendants of the Patriarchs (the Jews), belong to God as well. This is proof that Israel did not stumble in a final sense. God cannot be done with Israel because of His relationship and promises to the Patriarchs.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

Warnings Against Gentile Pride (Romans 11:16b-24)

... and if the root be holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their 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? (Romans 11:16b-24).

In verses 16b-24, Paul addresses the issue of how Gentiles should view their place in God's plan. He shows that Gentile salvation should not be a cause for arrogance against Israel. Israel is still

God's people and though they have been temporarily cut off from the place of blessing, it is not a difficult matter for Him to graft them into the place of blessings once again. To explain this, Paul uses another analogy involving an olive tree. In order to understand this analogy, however, it is important to have a general understanding of the Abrahamic covenant as found in Genesis. As one understands the basics of the covenant, Paul's point in Romans 11:16b-24 will become even more clear.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis twelve is the foundational chapter for the Abrahamic covenant. It is here that God gave Abraham certain promises:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

In this section we see that Abraham was promised certain things. Abraham was promised that his name would be made great and he would be blessed. He was told that a great nation would come from him and that he would be a blessing to others. This blessing would even extend to all the nations of the earth.

Land

Chapter 13 gives more details concerning the Abrahamic covenant. In this section, God promised the land of Palestine to Abraham and his descendants:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever (Genesis 13:14-15).

It is very important to remember that the Abrahamic covenant included the promise of a "land" to Abraham's physical descendants—and not only a land, but a land "forever." The land aspect of this

covenant must not be minimized or spiritualized. When God fulfills the Abrahamic covenant with Israel at His second coming, Israel will have full possession of the land promised in the covenant.

Seed

In Genesis 13:16, Abraham is also promised a “seed”: “‘And I will make your descendants (lit. “seed”) as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.’” The seed refers to the physical descendants of Abraham. They are the ones who will inherit the land. This agrees with what God promised Abraham in 12:2 when He said, “‘I will make you a great nation.’” This is a physical nation with physical descendants of Abraham.

In Genesis 15:5, God took Abraham outside to show him how numerous his descendants would be someday: “And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’” God is clearly speaking about literal descendants of Abraham. This cannot be spiritualized. For the full realization of the covenant, there must be literal physical descendants of Abraham.

Blessing

Another major provision of the Abrahamic covenant is the promise that through Abraham, “‘All the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Genesis 12:3). It is here we see that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant will extend to Gentiles. That directly ties in with what Paul is saying in Romans 11.

According to Genesis 12:3, God intended that some day Gentiles would be blessed through the Abrahamic covenant. This promise to Gentiles, though, is just one part of the Abrahamic covenant. This is significant because many today think that Gentile blessings in our day must mean that God is done with Israel and that the Church has taken over their blessings. But Gentile inclusion into the covenant does not mean Jewish exclusion. It is true that believing Gentiles have become a spiritual seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3:29) but that does not mean they have taken over the blessings promised to Abraham’s physical seed—the Jews. It is wrong to assume that just because Gentiles have entered into the blessings of the

Abrahamic covenant that the promises made to Abraham's physical descendants have been canceled.

When God made His covenant with Abraham, He made it very clear that full fulfillment could only come through Abraham's physical descendants. That is why God refused Abraham's request that Eliezer, his servant, be his heir. God told Abraham, "This man [Eliezer] will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). No matter how spiritual Eliezer may have been, he did not qualify to fulfill the promise made to Abraham. A physical descendant of Abraham was necessary for the full realization of the covenant.

We who are Gentiles should praise God that we have been grafted into the Abrahamic covenant, but on the other hand, we should not think that we fulfill the covenant in its entirety. We have entered into spiritual provisions of it, but we do not fulfill the covenant in its fulness. National promises of the covenant must be fulfilled by national Israel. Gentiles enter into the part that declares, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The establishment of the Abrahamic covenant

Not only are the promises of the Abrahamic covenant important, the way the covenant was instituted is also very significant. According to Genesis 15:9-21, Abraham was commanded by God to take animals of sacrifice, cut them in two, and lay them in two columns with a path in the middle (Genesis 15:9-10). When it came time to establish the covenant, God caused a great sleep to come upon Abraham, while God, Himself, passed through the sacrificial animal parts:

And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Gergashite and the Jebusite" (Genesis 15:17-21).

Back in Abraham's day, walking through divided animal pieces showed one's commitment to a covenant. These divided pieces represented what should happen to a person if he did not hold up his end of the covenant. The custom, in Abraham's day, was for both parties of the covenant to walk through the pieces. When they did, both parties were bound to keep the terms of the covenant.

With the Abrahamic covenant it is important to realize that God, alone, walked through the pieces. Abraham did not. In fact, God caused a great sleep to come upon Abraham when He walked through the parts. This is very important because this shows that God unilaterally obligated Himself to the covenant. That is why the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is not conditioned on Israel's obedience or faithfulness. Since God obligated Himself to fulfill His promises, it is His great Name that is at stake.

That is why the Abrahamic covenant is called an *unconditional* covenant. Its ultimate fulfillment is not conditioned on man's obedience. This does not mean that obedience is not important. There is discipline and judgment for failure to be obedient, but the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant is based on God's faithfulness. This does not minimize the unfaithfulness of Israel—it magnifies the faithfulness of God who always honors His Word.

This unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant is important to understand because of the unrelenting emphasis of some who still insist that God has rejected Israel. But if God has cast off Israel, there is a serious problem with God's integrity. If He led Abraham to believe there would be a literal fulfillment of His promises, how can He not fulfill what He promised?

At times, I receive material from people trying to convince me that the Church is spiritual Israel and that the Abrahamic covenant will not be fulfilled in the way God explained it to Abraham. I hope that is not the case. If the Abrahamic covenant is not fulfilled in the way God gave it, what assurance do Christians today have that God will fulfill the promises He made with us?

Summary of Abrahamic covenant

In summarizing the Abrahamic covenant, we see that God made three categories of promises. First, He made *individual* promises to

Abraham. Abraham was promised that he would be the father of a great nation, that he would be blessed and that he would have a great name. All of these promises have been literally fulfilled. Abraham became the father of the Jewish race, he was blessed and his name became great.

Second, God made *national* promises to Abraham's physical descendants, Israel. He promised they would be a great nation, that they would have great numbers and that they would inherit the land of Canaan forever. Israel has become a great nation, they have great numbers, but their possession of the land awaits the second coming of Christ.

Third, God made *universal* promises to the nations. He promised that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham. As we continue in Romans 11, it is this third aspect of the covenant that Gentiles have entered into. Gentiles cannot fulfill personal promises made to Abraham, nor can they fulfill national promises made to Israel. They can, however, fulfill the promises that relate to the nations.

The holy root

With Romans 11:16b, Paul begins his analogy of the root and branches: **and if the root be holy, the branches are too**. As with the first piece of dough in 16a, the **root** in this verse refers to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. The **branches** represent Abraham's physical descendants—the Jews. Just as there is a natural connection between a **root** and its **branches** there is a natural connection between the promises given to Abraham and the physical descendants of Abraham.

The natural branches and the wild olive branch

Paul then goes on to say, **But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches** (Romans 11:17-18a). The natural **branches** that were **broken off** refer to Israel's temporary removal from the place of blessing. Because of their rejection of Christ, Israel, for a time, has been cut off from the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

Notice, though, that not all of the **branches** (Jews) have been **broken off**, only **some** have. Paul and other believing Jews are examples of **branches** who have not been severed from the **root**. This remnant of believing Jews is a reminder that God has preserved a faithful line from Abraham.

The **you** in verse seventeen refers to Gentile believers who are likened to a **wild olive** branch. A **wild olive** branch was a branch that was unproductive and had no real value. Notice that these **wild olive** branches **were grafted in** with the natural **branches**. This means that believing Gentiles have now been grafted in with believing Jews in the place of covenant blessing and are partakers of the **rich root of the olive tree**. The **rich root**, like the “holy lump” of verse 16, refers to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

To summarize, Paul shows in this passage that most of the nation of Israel has been temporarily removed from the place of blessing, i.e. the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. But Gentiles, who formerly had no relationship to these promises, have been **grafted** into the place of blessing.

We must be careful here and not become confused as many have. Throughout this analogy, a distinction between Gentiles (wild olive branches) and Jews (natural branches) still exists. Though they both partake of blessings together, Gentiles do not become Jews just as the wild olive branches did not become natural branches. Though they are now linked to the same **root**, there is still a distinction between the natural **branches** (Jews) and the **wild olive** branches (Gentiles).

The call to humility

In verse 18, Paul makes an important exhortation to believing Gentiles: **do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you**. Knowing that these new blessings might become a source of pride, Paul calls on believing Gentiles to have a proper understanding of their place in the plan of God. Yes, they have been grafted into the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, but they are not to become **arrogant** and think they have taken over Israel’s place. Gentiles have experienced God’s salvation, but that salvation comes through Abraham, the father of Israel. The foundation for Gentile salvation has Jewish roots.

In verses 19-20, Paul deals with a hypothetical question that some of his readers may have been contemplating:

You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear.

Gentile inclusion into the covenant should not be a source of arrogance, it should be a source for **fear**. Gentiles are not saved because they are better or have been more faithful than Israel. They are saved by God’s grace. That leaves no room for pride.

We who are Gentiles should learn from Israel. As we see all the blessings available to Israel and yet see them in unbelief, that should cause us to tremble. That should remind us how weak we really are and make us trust God even more. That anyone is found faithful is a testimony to God’s grace not the strength of our character.

Verse 21 says, **For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.** Paul reminds the Gentiles that they are not exempt from being removed from the place of blessing. Just as Jews could not hold their position by simply being Jews, Gentiles cannot hold their position by simply being Gentiles. A Gentile should not say, “I’m glad I’m a Gentile and not a Jew.” There is no room for that kind of pride.

In verse 22, Paul says, **Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.** This verse shows the balance of how God deals with people. Many people like to talk about God’s love but are not as willing to talk about His wrath. The Scripture, though, presents God as one who is both *kind* and *severe*. To those who believe there is **kindness**. To those who reject Him there is **severity**. The Jews were disobedient and God dealt with them severely. For the time being they are **cut off**. The Gentiles who have believed, however, have received His **kindness**.

The Coming Restoration of Israel (Romans 11:23-24)

As Paul shows in verse 23, the present removal of Israel from the place of blessing is not permanent: **And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to**

graft them in again. Notice the condition here. If the Jews **do not continue in unbelief**, they will once again be **grafted in** to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. This shows that Israel's hardness is only temporary. There is a time coming when they will be **grafted in** again.

As verse 24 shows, this grafting of Israel into the place of blessing will be more natural than the grafting in of Gentiles: **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?** That Israel would be placed once again into the place of blessing is not a difficult thing for God. In fact, the amazing thing is not that God would restore Israel to the place of blessing, for that is where they belonged in the first place. What is more amazing is that He would remove the **natural branches** and graft in the **wild olive** branches. That is more difficult. We should not be surprised, then, that God is going to put Israel back into the place that was rightfully theirs to begin with.

Again we see that the Jews (**natural branches**) have not lost their identity. Even in unbelief Israel is still Israel. The idea that the Church has become spiritual Israel so that there is no identity left with the physical nation is foreign to Scripture. I realize that in the Church, Jews and Gentiles make up one body, but here the issue is Israel and Gentiles. Through the entire analogy, the **wild olive** branch remains a **wild olive** branch. The **natural branches** remain **natural branches**. They do not merge in such a way that there are no distinctions.

C H A P T E R F O U R

Israel's Future Salvation ***(Romans 11:25-36)***

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:25-36).

In this section of Romans 11, Paul comes to the climax of his argument that God has not rejected Israel. He shows that this era of Gentile salvation will someday reach a climactic point. When it does, God will resume His program with Israel, and Israel will be saved.

The mystery

Paul begins this section by stating, **For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed.** By doing this, he is emphasizing the importance of this truth he is about to reveal. It is essential, then, that Christians be informed about God's revealed will on this matter.

What Paul is about to reveal is a **mystery**. A **mystery** is new truth. It is something that is now being revealed that could not be understood apart from divine revelation. It is truth not found in the Old Testament. In Romans 16:25, Paul defined a **mystery** as something "which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested." This new truth addresses how the salvation of Gentiles and the salvation of Israel works together in God's plan.

Paul wants the Gentiles to understand this **mystery** so they do not become proud in their thinking. It is sometimes said that knowledge leads to pride, but that is not true when it is received in a proper way. It is also true that lack of knowledge can lead to pride. If the Gentiles do not understand this **mystery** Paul is about to tell them, there is the danger they will become proud and think they are more deserving of God's salvation than the Jews. But when they see how God's plan for Jews and Gentiles works together, they will have a proper understanding of where they fit in God's plan. Knowledge correctly received leads to humility.

What is this **mystery**? It is that **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in.** We looked at the term **hardening** in Romans 11:7. It means "callous" and denotes a dullness and insensitivity. In this case the hardening refers to Israel's spiritual condition. Notice, though, that this **hardening of Israel** is only **partial**. Not every Jew has rejected the Gospel; some have believed. Paul, himself, was a testimony that some Jews were believing in Christ.

We also see from this verse that not only is this **hardening** of Israel **partial**, it is also temporary. The word **until** is significant

because it shows that this hardening of Israel is only for a set period of time. It will only go on **until the fulness of the Gentiles** has come in.

What is this **fulness of the Gentiles**? The **fulness of the Gentiles** relates to the current age we live in, the Church age. It is in this age that God is primarily saving Gentiles. This era of Gentile salvation will reach a culminating point at the Rapture of the Church. Only God knows when the **fulness** of this Gentile era will end, but when it does, the church will be raptured and God will focus once again on His people **Israel**. This is not to say that no Gentiles will be saved during this period. But it does mean the focus of God's program will once again be on **Israel**.

The **fulness of the Gentiles** mentioned in Romans 11:25 should not be confused with the "times of the Gentiles" referred to in Luke 21:24. In the Luke passage, Jesus said, "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This "times of the Gentiles" refers to the period when Jerusalem is under Gentile control. This period began with the conquering of Jerusalem by Babylon in 605 B.C. and ends at Christ's second coming to earth. When Jesus Christ comes again to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, the "times of the Gentiles" will end. Thus, the "times of the Gentiles" covers a broader period of time than the **fulness of the Gentiles**. The "times of the Gentiles" runs from 605 B.C. until Christ's return to earth. The **fulness of the Gentiles**, on the other hand, runs from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 through the Rapture of the Church.

The salvation of Israel

Verse 26 tells us that after the **fulness of the Gentiles** comes in, **all Israel will be saved**. This is the climax of Paul's argument in Romans 11. Once God has completed His program with the Gentiles at the Rapture, He will once again resume His plan with Israel. When He does, Israel, as a nation, will experience God's salvation. In the plainest language possible, Paul tells us that **all Israel will be saved**. This does not necessarily mean that every single Jew will be saved. We know from other passages that when Christ comes back there will be a judgment of living Jews at the end of the Tribulation. Some Jews will be judged for their unbelief and will not be allowed

to enter the earthly kingdom. Nonetheless, there will be a large-scale conversion of the nation.

Back in Romans 11:12, Paul talked about the “fulfillment” of Israel. The word he used for “fulfillment” is the same word translated “fulness” in Romans 11:25 in reference to Gentiles. We could say, then, that there is a “fulness of Israel” and a “**fulness of the Gentiles.**” The **fulness of the Gentiles** will be followed by the “fulness of Israel.” The fulness of Israel will take place when God pours out His salvation blessings on the nation of Israel and they are grafted back into the place of favor.

Contrary to what some Bible teachers have said, the **Israel** in Romans 11:26 can only refer to national Israel. Of the eleven times “Israel” is used in Romans 9-11, not once is the title used of Gentiles or the Church. Many have erred on this point and have claimed that the **Israel** spoken of here is not national Israel but spiritual Israel, i.e., the Church. This, again, is bad hermeneutics. The context clearly reveals that only national Israel is in view here. The contrast in this verse is between Gentiles and Israel: **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved.** This statement is nonsense if the contrast is not between physical **Israel** and physical **Gentiles**.

Old Testament support

After making the proclamation that **all Israel will be saved**, Paul supports his statement from the Old Testament. He quotes first from Isaiah 59:20: **just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”** This quote from Isaiah tells of the deliverance Christ will bring Israel at His second coming. According to Old Testament texts such as Isaiah 59:20, not only will Israel be saved spiritually, there will also be a physical deliverance of the nation as well. This spiritual and physical deliverance was presented by Christ at His first coming, but the nation rejected Him and the peace only He could bring. Shortly before His death Jesus mourned over Israel when He said:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being

left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'" (Matthew 23:37-39).

At His first coming, Christ "wanted to gather" Israel to Himself, but they were "unwilling." In Luke 19:44, Jesus told the nation that destruction would come upon them and Jerusalem because they did not recognize the time of their "visitation." The Messiah was in their midst but they rejected Him. Instead of peace they would now experience suffering and destruction (Luke 19:41-44). Their "house," or temple would become "desolate." This happened in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. But this time of desolation would not last forever. In Matthew 23:39, Jesus said there will come a future day when the nation would truly say, "BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" When Israel believes in Christ, He will come again to Jerusalem to set up His kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The next quotation in Romans 11:27 comes either from Isaiah 27:9 or Jeremiah 31:31: AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS. This quotation is a reference to the New Covenant God made with Israel in the Old Testament (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). In this covenant, God promised that some day all of Israel would be saved and they would receive many spiritual and physical blessings. Some today want to say that the New Covenant has been transferred to the Church and no longer applies to national Israel. This verse, though, shows that God still intends on fulfilling it with Israel. It is true that Gentiles today participate in the salvation blessings of the New Covenant, but the full fulfillment of that New Covenant will take place only when Israel is saved and Christ establishes His earthly kingdom.

According to verse 27, when Christ comes again He will take away the sins of Israel. There can be no doubt that God promised salvation to the nation Israel. This fits in with God's purposes for the Tribulation period. Not only is the Tribulation a time when God pours out His wrath on an unbelieving world, it is also a time when He brings the nation Israel to their knees. He brings Israel to the point where they will repent and believe in Jesus as their Messiah.

The Certainty of Israel's Calling (Romans 11:28-29)

Verse 28 says, **From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.** Paul looks at the current state of the Jews from two perspectives. First, **from the standpoint of the Gospel they are enemies.** The Jews are **enemies** because they oppose God's plan of salvation and are in rebellion against Him. As a result, they are experiencing the hardening of His judgment. But this hardening is for the **sake** of the Gentiles. Because of the hardness of Israel, God is now bringing salvation to the Gentiles. Some people want to stop with this and say God is done with Israel. But there is another side: **from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.** Israel is still loved by God because they are chosen by God. This election is **for the sake of the fathers.** God cannot reject Israel because of the promises He made to the **fathers** of Israel—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! This is an important point that we must not forget. God cannot abandon Israel, for if He did, that would mean He broke His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The irrevocable promises of God

In verse 29, we see how fixed God's purposes are for Israel: **for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.** The word **irrevocable** is placed at the beginning of the sentence in the Greek for added emphasis. Paul literally says, "**Irrevocable** are the gifts and calling of God." When God calls an individual or a nation, they can never lose that **calling**. If this were the only verse in the New Testament we had regarding God's plan for Israel, it would be enough. It means that every promise to Israel in the Old Testament must be fulfilled. Because of a verse like this, I am distressed at the constant insistence that God is done with Israel. If God's calling of Israel is **irrevocable**, Israel must have a future in His plan.

Even with Israel in a current state of unbelief, Paul affirms that the covenant promises still belong to them. In Romans 9:4, Paul says that to the "Israelites" belongs "the covenants. . . and the promises, whose are the fathers." Even with the Church age in existence, Paul sees a future fulfillment of God's covenant promises with Israel. In Romans 3:1, Paul asked the question, "Then what advantage has

the Jew? Or what benefit of circumcision?" He answers by saying, "Great in every respect. . . . If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be!" (Romans 3:2-3). When there are clear passages such as these, how can anyone think God is done with Israel?

The Mercy of God (Romans 11:30-32)

The unfaithfulness of men cannot nullify the faithfulness of God. Nor can God's electing purposes be divided up. There is not a national election with Israel He may go back on and an individual election with Christians He must keep. God's electing purposes are rooted in His character. Just as our salvation is secure because of God's unchanging character, Israel's salvation is also secure. If Israel's place in the plan of God is not secure, the promises of God are meaningless and our security as believers is built on sand. But we do know that God is faithful to His promises. As verses 30-32 say:

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.

Notice that the words **disobedience** and **mercy** are used four times in these verses. Both terms apply to Jews and Gentiles. How can we as Gentiles say, "God is done with Israel because of their disobedience"? Gentiles, too, have been **disobedient**. Do we understand the arrogance of saying that God is done with Israel as a nation because of their unfaithfulness? Have we been more faithful? Do we stand redeemed in the sight of God, the object of His love and destined for glory because of our great faithfulness? According to this passage, God's mercy for a **disobedient** Israel will be as great as His **mercy** to disobedient Gentiles.

God's Plans Are Reason for Praise (Romans 11:33-36)

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE

LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?" Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

As Paul concludes his argument in this section, he is overwhelmed with the greatness of God. Only a marvelous God with infinite wisdom could use the sin of Israel to bring about great blessings to the nations.

When I read this burst of praise from Paul, I think of how important it is for us as Christians to study what God has revealed about the future. Sometimes I meet Christians who say they do not like to study prophecy or try to figure out the details of what God has planned for the future. Studying prophecy, though, gives us a greater appreciation of the greatness of our God. Christians who do not grapple with God's revelation cannot fully appreciate God's wonderful plans.

C O N C L U S I O N

Paul has made it very clear in Romans 11 that God has a future for Israel. The following is a summary of the main points he has used to prove this:

- 1) Twice Paul emphatically stated that “God has not rejected His people” (11:1a, 2a). This “people” is national Israel.
- 2) Paul, and other saved Jews make up a remnant that shows God has not rejected Israel (11:1b, 2b-5).
- 3) Israel is foreknown by God (11:2a).
- 4) Israel’s election is based on God’s “grace” and not on works (11:6).
- 5) Paul says that Israel’s stumbling would not turn into an irreversible fall (11:11).
- 6) The purpose of Gentile salvation is to make Israel jealous (11:14).
- 7) The “rejection” of Israel will be followed by their “acceptance” (11:15).
- 8) It is a natural thing for Israel to be grafted in once more to the place of blessing that is rightfully theirs (11:17-24).
- 9) Israel’s national hardening is only for a limited period of time. It is only “until” the fulness of the Gentiles comes in (11:25).
- 10) Paul states explicitly that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26a).
- 11) Israel’s national salvation is in line with Old Testament

promises concerning their salvation and restoration (11:26-27).

12) Israel's standing before God is linked to God's love for the fathers of Israel (11:28).

13) God cannot reject Israel because His calling of Israel is "irrevocable" (11:29).

What we see from Romans 11 is that our God is a God who keeps His promises. That should thrill our hearts as believers. We do not have to worry that God will make promises that He will not keep. What He says will come to pass. That is true for us as individuals, and it is true for Israel as a nation.

Those, however, who believe that God is done with Israel as a nation should examine their position more closely. It is a very serious matter to teach that God is done with Israel when the Bible so clearly states the opposite. We must heed Paul's warning to "not become arrogant toward the branches [Israel]" (Romans 11:18). The position that God has replaced Israel is not a biblical view but an "arrogant" one. That is what the Word of God says on this matter. We must be careful when judging the motives of men but I am concerned that those who think God is done with Israel may be more influenced by unbiblical presuppositions than the clear statements of Scripture.