



Romans - Chapter Eleven

V Romans 9:1-11:36 - God's righteousness to Israel and to the Gentiles
(continues/concludes)

V.b Romans 9:30-11:10 - Israel's rejection of God's saving promises
(continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

Paul opens the chapter with a rhetorical question asking if God has cast off the unbelieving Jews in favour of the Gentiles for good. Paul immediately responds passionately and with outright indignation that God would never do that. He then goes on to give an account from scripture of Elijah's time when he felt isolated in the face of persecution by Ahab and Jezebel only for God to reassure him that he has set apart a remnant of Israel for himself. There are still more Jews who would come to faith in Christ in the fullness of time.

Paul then goes on to explain, still using scripture, that Israel had misunderstood their own calling by misunderstanding scripture itself, and had pursued righteousness and obedience through works of the law. For this reason God had hardened their hearts so that they would remain in their misunderstanding when Jesus came and could not therefore recognise him for who he was, they would disown their long awaited Lord and Saviour.

Paul then uses two agricultural metaphors. The first is the idea of offering the first fruits of the crop, a concept familiar to Jews and others versed in OT scripture, and seen as a requirement of the law that would bring blessing to their crops and, at the same time, would honour God. This in fact was misunderstood by the Jews and was a way of ensuring that God's true people, his crop, were holy through the offering of the firstfruits; initially this was Jesus on the Cross but also those early Jews who came to faith in Jesus as the Christ.

He then moves to the idea of grafting branches into an olive tree. It was well known in Mediterranean countries that cultivated olives were fruitful but not as strong as those that grew in the wild. However, the latter bore little fruit and that which it did was often bitter. So what horticulturists did was to graft in the fruitful, cultivated shoots as branches into the vigorous wild olive. This would produce a strong tree with a bountiful crop. In the analogy, Paul quite deliberately reversed the process to show that, although the Jews were the vigorous but cultivated tree, through having the law, scriptures and other privileges, God would cut off the branches of those who did not turn to Christ, the ones whose hearts he had hardened, and would graft in wild branches, i.e. the Gentile believers, who would still be fruitful as they fed off the cultivated root, i.e. spiritual Israel and the covenant promises made to Abraham. Paul was careful to point out though that Gentiles should not make the same mistakes as the Jews and become complacent or arrogant about their place in the tree

as God could just as easily cut them off again if their faith became unbelief. Paul also made it known that it would be easy for God to re-graft in the branches that had been chopped off if the unbelieving Jews came to faith, as the hardening of the hearts, of some of them at least, was only temporary.

Paul then unravels the mystery of why God had acted in this way. Had the Jews believed in Christ from the start then his death and resurrection, if even needed, would have been seen just as an extension to their already perceived nationalistic privileges, and that any Gentiles that came to faith in Christ would be second class Christians, with the Jews taking primacy. By hardening the hearts of the Jews and excluding them from the family, God gave the Gentile world the opportunity to come to faith on equal terms with the Jews to make a single family once those Jews, the remnant that God had said he would save, were finally brought in, which will occur either during the church age, on or at least before the final day. Gentiles were warned, however, not to reverse roles with the Jews in order to make themselves the primacy in the church with Jews secondary. For in the church of Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

Paul ends the chapter with words of praise to God from Isaiah, Job and himself.

V.b.ii Romans 11:1-10 - The remnant of Israel

Paul makes three points to start with:

1. That, although some of the Jews were cast off, not all were.
2. That, although the body of the Jews were cast off, the Gentiles were accepted in.
3. That, although the Jews were cast off for now, there would come a time when they would be accepted once again into the church of Christ.

Those Jews that are not cast off are again those whom God foreknew, which he calls the elect or his election. Paul himself was one such chosen one and can point to the fact: <<But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel">> (Acts 9:15).

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:1

The majority of Israel failed to believe. Does this mean that God has rejected his people? Paul presents himself as an example of one of God's elect. He will also go on to show that God has a further remnant in mind that has been preserved, a remnant that indicates that God is not finished with Israel and that he will fulfil the promises made to his people.

The whole identify of being a Jew was to be chosen as a son of God. This was a concept that seeped from every fibre of their being and there was nothing of greater concern to a Jew than that God would cast his people aside. It had been recorded that God would if they did not obey him, a command that was so frequently ignored but, up until the times of the exiles at least, it seemed that God's love for his people Israel far outweighed their ability to sin against him. The language Paul uses is very much in line of that familiar to the Jews around the time before the exiles, e.g. <<I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes>> (2 Kings 21:14), and: <<Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the Lord has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath>> (Jeremiah 7:29). Has what the prophet spoke of generations before happened again, or rather happened now at last with eschatological finality? Has God rejected his covenant people once and for all? Paul feels he has to pose this question but immediately responds against the whole idea by stating by no means! By then setting himself up as an example against the idea of God's abandonment, Paul

is not doing so as one self confident in his own status over against his people, but of one confident in God on behalf of his people. Not as one outside the covenant, one for whom the covenant is no longer of significance, does Paul here speak, but precisely as a member of the covenant people. It is not because he is a Christian that Paul can dismiss the suggestion that God has repudiated his people, by implication, in favour of the Gentiles, but because he is an Israelite, because he is so conscious that he belongs to God's people. It is precisely as a Jew that Paul reaffirms God's faithfulness to the Jews.

² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed to God against Israel:

Romans 11:2

Here, Paul further answers the question in v.1 using almost the same words used to pose the question - God did not reject his people. This is language that again would be familiar to his first readers: <<For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own>> (1 Samuel 12:22), and: <<For the Lord will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance>> (Psalm 94:14); and this promise would be particularly appropriate since it came as a reassurance to Israel despite its sin: <<"Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart">> (1 Samuel 12:20), and: <<Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law">> (Psalm 94:12).

God foreknew. God knew the character of his people before he chose them as his people, and that means he also foreknew their frequent unfaithfulness to him, including now their wide scale rejection of the Gospel. That is precisely why their rejection of the Gospel makes no difference to God's commitment to them. Had it been the case that their unfaithfulness was going to make any difference to God's faithfulness, he would never have chosen them in the first place and he certainly would never have entered into covenant with them, placing his reputation upon their shoulders! Paul's confidence is two-fold: that Israel is not acting in any way unforeseen by God; and that consequently God remains faithful to Israel notwithstanding Israel's failure. Just as the choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau was without regard to their future conduct: <<Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" >> (Romans 9:10-13), so Israel's status as God's people remains unaffected by Israel's latest and most serious failure. See also comments made on Romans 8:29.

³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Romans 11:3-5

Paul makes reference to 1 Kings 19:14 <<He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too">>, where Elijah makes intercession against Israel, when their apostasy was at its peak, or at least for the northern tribes under King Ahab and his wicked Baal-worshipping queen Jezebel, and Elijah, in his despair, thought Israel would be extinguished. But God assured Elijah that he had preserved a remnant, which gave Elijah hope that God would fulfil his saving promises in the future. In Paul's day, as in Elijah's day (v.4), and even today, a remnant of Jews believe in Christ because of God's electing grace: <<Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah" >> (Romans 9:27-29), <<Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops>> (James 5:17-18), shows Elijah to be a man of prayer and faith; clearly a man that does business with God when he prays. Amongst the great apostasy and idolatry of his time, it seemed to Elijah that he was the only one left: <<When the righteous triumph, there is great elation; but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding>> (Proverbs 28:12), but God never leaves himself without considerable witness, and he lets Elijah know that he has kept 7,000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal. So it is with the Gospel, God will always keep some of his original people, who were chosen as a pointer to God for all the other nations from the time Abraham was first called, to come to know the fullness of that Gospel and benefit by it as being faithful servants to the very end of time. From these 7,000, the faithful remnant of Israel, and a mere 120 in the early Jerusalem church, God would see real fruit: <<After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands>> (Revelation 7:9). God had chosen a remnant of faithful Jews from all those who would not turn to Christ. This is called a remnant according to the election of grace; they are such as were chosen from eternity in the councils of divine love to be vessels of grace and glory; called purely by the grace of God. It is not by works otherwise it would not be by grace, for it cannot be called properly grace if it is not properly free. Ephesians 1:5 states <<he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will>>, and shows it is by the good pleasure of his will.

Elijah seems to have been on the point of depression even though he had just come through a period of great triumph in seeing the drought, which had lasted over two years, come to an end in answer to his prayer and the great victory for God that he had over the priests of Baal, and yet he is so down at his situation. So too Paul comes across that way at times. He has won a great victory in the Lord in bringing thousands of pagans to faith in the Gospel, yet like Elijah's despair, Paul is not elated but dejected to see that, despite the fulfilment of all of God's promises, Paul still sees his countrymen in open rebellion against God by rejecting the Gospel of Christ.

Paul, of course, was not actually depressed although at one point at least in his ministry he may have been: <<We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead>> (2 Corinthians 1:8-9); sometimes you have to hit rock bottom in order to be ready to hear again the message of resurrection. This is what gives shape and energy to the solution he will now offer.

What is of significance here is not simply that 7,000 men have retained their faith in the Lord, but that God has sustained their faith; their continuing faithfulness is a demonstration of God's continuing faithfulness in his covenant promise and people. Just as God sustained and carried out his covenant purpose through such a minority then, so it is now and will continue to be so.

Paul's stance in the face of opposition from his countrymen is an expression of firm assurance that, as an Israelite, he could rest confidently in Israel's scriptures and draw deductions about God's faithfulness to Israel from the precedents clearly attested to in the scriptures.

In the face of these two witnesses, Isaiah's threat of exile and God's faithful remnant in Elijah's time, no Jew or Gentile sympathiser could deny that in the past God had preserved his covenant faithfulness to his people through a remnant, or deny the possibility of his doing so again in the present time. Moreover, as one conscious of living in the new era introduced by Christ, i.e. at the present time, Paul no doubt saw such patterns of God's previous dealings with Israel as having not merely typical, but typological significance; prefiguring the way in which he would deal with his people at the end of time, a climax of the ages: <<For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did – and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did – and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come>> (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). That only a minority of Jews have believed the word of faith about Christ Jesus is only to be expected by those who can read the ways of God in the history of his people.

Chosen by grace. For the first time Paul introduces the word grace in his treatment of God's faithfulness to Israel; for the first time he links the two concepts election and grace. Clearly there is a deliberate attempt on Paul's part to bring together these two key concepts which, between them, could be said to sum up the two main thrusts of his overall argument: election, which quintessentially expresses Israel's self-understanding as the chosen people of God; grace which so richly expresses Paul's understanding of his experience of the gracious power of God through faith in Christ. By introducing grace as part of God's election, Paul is not trying to deny the existence of grace before Christ, just that it was lost or at least obscured to many while they remained within the limits of their traditional understanding of Judaism. Paul is saying that conversion to following Jesus is a rediscovery of God's election and grace, not given to Israel initially because of anything they had done but by an act of sheer generosity on the part of God.

Could it really be that God had turned his back on the Jews and chosen for himself a new people? A disturbingly large number of people throughout church history right through until the present era have taken on the reversal of Jewish national pride to believe the promises are theirs and that the Jews are disbarred from the church. Jesus Christ is and always will be Lord of all, therefore there never was and never will be any place for prejudice in his church.

So what is the answer? Have we reached again the point in Romans 3:1-8 <<What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – "Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved>>. Is God again in a situation, where he either has to keep his promises to Israel or bring justice to the world? If God, faithful to his promises, has uncovered his plan of salvation full and finally in Christ, how can that

faithfulness be worked out in practise in relation to the people to whom and through whom it was still promised? Paul does not give a single answer but it comes out in stages, starting here, with the familiar notion of a remnant: <<And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land" >> (Isaiah 6:13), and: <<On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised>> (Isaiah 9:20-23), which Paul also used in Romans 9:27-28. No doubt with the Isaiah 6:13 reference God would always allow for new shoots to grow out of the stumps. God allowed just a few to return from Babylonian exile in order to re-establish his people, the story of which is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Some groups of Paul's day, including those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, possibly the Essenes, saw themselves as this distinct remnant, as many of the Jews of their day had drifted away from serving God in the way they thought he wanted them to. By rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, his teaching, his miraculous works, his death and resurrection, the majority of Jews were in danger of voluntary exile from the true people of God, Abraham's spiritual family, whom they should and could still be a part of.

Paul may have sometimes felt isolated, in the way Elijah had, but he was not alone. After all, all the early Christians, including all the apostles, were Jews and we know from Paul's visit to Jerusalem just a few months after this letter was written that the church there had grown significantly with thousands of Jewish converts, although many of them were hanging on to their heritage: <<When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law">> (Acts 21:20).

But Paul shows that, at the end of the day, the remnant, those who hadn't fallen away, those like himself, exist not because they deserved to, not because they formed a small number for who keeping the law and clinging to ancestral privilege had worked after all, but because, once those props had been kicked away they found themselves in the dock along with everyone else: <<Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin>> (Romans 3:20), God called them by sheer grace through the Gospel. There is no other way. It is all because of the will of God and his unmerited grace.

Therefore, regarding Paul's apparent depression, there is no need for anyone to plunge into gloom over what seems to have happened. It is serious; but God's plans, God's power and God's grace are more than equal to the problem, any problem we may ever face.

⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

[Romans 11:6](#)

Election and grace are inseparable, for both show that salvation is God's work alone, and that it has nothing to do with works. On grace we should also note: <<Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness>> (Romans 4:4-5), <<No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" >> (Acts 15:11), and: <<For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast>> (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If v.5 shows the continuity of God's grace and favour then here we have the concept of discontinuity. This discontinuity lies with Israel's misunderstanding of God's selection as being through grace and the bulk of the Jews had instead understood their faithfulness to be in the observance or by works of the law, and not an acceptance of God's grace. And now they cannot depend, in particular, on a Gentile having to assume the ethnic and religious identity of a Jew by committing himself to observe the customs and ritual obligations peculiar to the Jews, e.g. circumcision, Sabbath observation, food laws, etc, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Clearly, in vv.5-6, Paul is trying to achieve a summary statement, which draws together the most important elements of his whole thesis so far. In doing so, for the first time, somewhat surprisingly, Paul brings works and grace into direct antithesis. Thereby, we are given confirmation that Paul's understanding of divine grace is not antithetical to law as such, despite the possible implication of: <<What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!>> (Romans 6:14-15), but to law understood in terms of works. Law after all can be linked in Paul's mind with grace, i.e. law of faith (Romans 3:27), and law of righteousness (Romans 9:31), in a way inconceivable for works. It is the reduction of God's election to matters of ethnic and ritual identity, which Paul sees as the fatal misunderstanding and abandonment of God's grace and of the election of grace.

⁷ What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,

Romans 11:7

Paul points out that Israel had not found what it sought; that is, justification through the works of the law: <<but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it>> (Romans 9:31), which had been given to a small election, not the elect, and not the majority who had a spirit of blindness upon them making them unable to see the truth.

What may at first glance seem like a summary statement is just another of Paul's launch pads to further extend his argument. What Paul has made clear is that the corollary of election is one was hardening of another because it helped explain Israel's present obtuseness in the face of the Gospel. Now that election is to be seen as election of the remnant, the corollary this time applies to the rest of Israel apart from the remnant. The misunderstanding and unbelief of most of Paul's fellow Jews is no accident; it is God's doing; it is the obverse of his extending his electing grace to Gentile as well as Jew, just as the rejection of Esau and hardening of Pharaoh was the obverse of his election of Israel.

⁸ as it is written:

“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes so that they could not see
and ears so that they could not hear,
to this very day.”

⁹ And David says:

“May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever.”

Romans 11:8-10

The composite citation from Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4, again modified by Paul to change from indicating an excuse for Israel's obtuseness into an act of deliberate intent on God's part, which clarifies that God has hardened Israel (v.7) so that they would not see or hear. It is unlikely that this modification by Paul would have been considered as unjustified in light of his assertions and argument to date, especially as Isaiah was just as forceful in his assertions against the people of his day.

Moreover, the implication which Paul no doubt intended, by continuing the quotation to the last line, is that it is the same obtuseness to this very day. Israel's misunderstanding of and disobedience to the word of faith is but the continuation and eschatological climax of a sustained lack of perception on Israel's part. At the same time, the Jewish Christians among Paul's first readership might also justifiably infer that if God so dealt with his people while they were indeed the exclusive focus of his covenant concern, then there can be good hope that his present punitive action toward Israel does not signify a complete change in God's purpose for or his abandonment of Israel.

Paul then prays for judgment over the Jews of his day who have rejected Christ. He does so by quoting David from Psalm 69:22-23, with perhaps a hint of mixing it with Psalm 35:8 <<may ruin overtake them by surprise – may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin>>, both of which are clearly David's cries against his enemies. Throughout the generations, the Jews had taken David's words and frequently used them against Israel's enemies of their own days, and they served well for that purpose. So, too, Paul does the same here and indeed the early church accepted both Psalm 35 and 69 as relating to Jesus, and most would say Psalm 69 foretells of the suffering of Christ at the hands of his own people with a specific comment about giving him vinegar to drink, which was fulfilled and recorded in Matthew 27:48 <<Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink>>. After their rejection of Jesus, the Jewish people became infatuated with their own politics, became a people whose backs were bowed in slavery and, through their misguided actions and God's providential wrath, found destruction at the hands of the Romans. Such treatment of the Jews has remained in this vein throughout history and right across the world. Even now that they have access to part of their original Promised Land they do not enjoy the blessings of God that they once did, although he clearly cares for them and has miraculously preserved them throughout all their trials and tribulations. They would long ago have been exterminated as a race otherwise.

Yet even for those who were more familiar with the traditional Jewish reference of Psalm 69 and less familiar with its Christian interpretation, Paul's use of it would by no means lack sense or justification. For in the argument of Chapters 9-11, Paul has now clearly established the point that what Israel earlier thought was true of the Gentiles is now proving true of Israel itself. And this includes the curse that Israel had invoked on its enemies: by their resistance to the election of grace (v.5) the rest of Israel had put themselves in the position of those on whom David originally invoked his curse; they turned their own imprecation back upon themselves.

Their backs bent forever would quite likely evoke in Paul the sense of oppression and slavery with which he now looked back on his own Pharisaic zeal for works and scrupulosity in things of the law: <<Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is

written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery>> (Galatians 4:21-5:1), and: <<as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith>> (Philippians 3:6-9). Christ became a stumbling block to most of the Jews only because they had already tripped and ensnared themselves in a ritual practice, which handicapped rather than helped them in the pursuit of righteousness: <<but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone" >> (Romans 9:31-32), and which so reinforced their religious self-identity in nationalistic terms that they were unable to recognise the eschatological and universal significance of the word of Christ.

V.c Romans 11:11-32 - God's righteousness in his plan for Jews and Gentiles

God's saving righteousness is featured in the salvation of Israel at the end of history, and in his saving plan for both Jews and Gentiles.

V.c.i Romans 11:11-24 - Ingrafted branches

The next stage of the argument is to develop the hints dropped in the previous chapter by these words: <<Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" >> (Romans 10:19-21). Having shown that Israel's hardening at this stage in the history of salvation was purposed by God just as much as Pharaoh's at an earlier stage, Paul now hastens to add that this is not the whole story. God's punitive action against the majority of Israel is not his last act in the history of salvation; these menacing scriptures are not his last word concerning Israel.

Paul loved his heritage, his country and his brethren. But it was to the Gentiles he was set apart to be an apostle to: <<While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" >> (Acts 13:2). He warns the Gentiles:

1. To respect the Jews and desire their inclusion in the church (v.12 and v.15).
2. To ensure they themselves did not stumble and fall as many of the Jews had (vv.17-22).

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

Romans 11:11

Paul again poses a rhetorical question to ascertain whether Israel had fallen beyond hope, whether this time it was fatal, i.e. beyond recovery. Paul immediately, and it would seem once again passionately, refutes the very thought - not at all! This short statement would maybe alert his readership that an answer to the questions posed throughout this letter to date was approaching.

Israel's hardening is not the final word. God planned salvation history so that Israel's transgression would open salvation for the Gentiles, and the Jews in turn would be provoked to jealousy when they saw Gentiles being saved and enjoying a relationship with God. It is not likely that their transgression here would refer to their handing over of Jesus to the authorities for his crucifixion for, as savage and brutal as it was, without such a death and subsequent resurrection we would all be lost. However, we must not forget that God's predeterminism does not absolve human responsibility. It seems more likely that the transgression was their failure to recognise Jesus as their long awaited and promised Messiah, and to reject God by rejecting Jesus: <<As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it>> (John 12:47-49).

To make Israel envious. The purpose of God, now extended to the Gentiles, does not end with the salvation of the Gentiles. Indeed, the salvation of the Gentiles is not an end in itself; it also has in view the salvation, i.e. the restoration of Israel. God has not abandoned his people even in the act of hardening them. He has not torn up his covenant with Israel and started again. Even his punitive action against the bulk of Israel has Israel's salvation in view as well. Herein Paul's earlier conviction, that Israel's unfaithfulness has not nullified God's faithfulness, begins to achieve coherent expression. Paul the Jew at last begins to show how even his own people's unbelief and disobedience provides a double source of comfort for his anguish expressed earlier; it is precisely that unbelief and disobedience which led to the Gospel being offered to the Gentiles, which in turn will spur his fellow Jews to faith.

There are many stories in the bible where brother turned on brother because they were envious; because of their jealousy. We have the story known as the Prodigal Son told by Jesus, i.e. the Parable of the Lost Son in Luke 15:11-32, where the younger son takes his share of the inheritance early, squanders it and then returns to the family home, he thinks in disgrace, only to find he is welcomed home as if he were royalty. This treatment angered the elder brother, who would not join in the celebrations and even accused his father of not really caring for him. Cain killed Abel because God accepted Abel's offering, Ishmael taunted his younger brother Isaac because he knew the latter was favoured in the family, Esau became enraged when Jacob received his blessing from their father, and ten of Joseph's brothers ganged up to sell him into slavery as their father had favoured him above the rest. Although these stories are often left hanging in scripture for the reader to ponder the outcome, Joseph himself gives an answer to what had happened in his case, when he said to his brothers: <<You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives>> (Genesis 50:20). Here, Paul is talking as if the Gentiles were the younger brother being given the blessings in the hope of making the elder brother, i.e. the unbelieving Jews, react through jealousy, which Paul hopes will cause them to take the right way and accept Jesus as their long awaited Messiah, so that they too can receive all the family blessings and benefits that would result from such a choice.

Paul again objects at the suggestion that any actions should imply unrighteousness on the part of God for, although it was divine appointment that the Gentiles were invited into the kingdom and church, it was Israel's rejection that opened the way for them in the first place. In reality, there is plenty of room for all, of course: <<In my Father's house are many

rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you>> (John 14:2).

¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

Romans 11:12

Riches for the world. Lest Paul's predominantly Gentile readership should think that their salvation is only a means to an end to bring Israel to saving faith, Paul goes on to re-express the point in terms which show that his vision is larger and richer for all. What Paul is saying is that Israel's rejection of the Gospel has brought benefits to the rest of mankind; their acceptance will bring still more benefit to all. The point is clear: Israel's future conversion does not mean that the benefits, which have accrued to the Gentiles, will be withdrawn; on the contrary, Gentiles will enjoy still greater benefits along with Israel. Israel's spiritual prosperity and the rest of the world's are not antithetical; riches for the world means wealth for all. Although Israel had misunderstood its covenant role as being a beacon for God to all the nations, that role would still be fulfilled through the grace and mercy of God. The covenant promise is not exclusive to either Jew or Gentile; it was always intended to be fully experienced and fully enjoyed by all.

Had Israel not been blinded by God to the coming of Jesus as the Christ then his death and resurrection would simply have been seen by them and others as affirmation of Israel's special status with God, and the rest of the world would have remained lost and isolated. This was never in God's plan.

The term world is another word for the Gentiles in its use here.

Fullness looks forward to the fulfilment of God's saving promises to ethnic Israel. Paul argues from the lesser to the greater: if Israel's sin brought salvation to the Gentiles, then the blessing will be even greater when all Israel is saved, see v.15.

The Parable of the Great Feast implies what has now occurred: <<Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find'>> (Matthew 22:8-9), <<The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet'>> (Luke 14:21-24), <<Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles">> (Acts 13:46), and: <<But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles">> (Acts 18:6). God will build his church and the great feast will occur with sufficient guests attending to fill his kingdom. If one set of guests declines to come then there are plenty of others who will. The transgression of the Jews is the riches of the world and shows the Gospel was given to the Gentiles so much the sooner: <<that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation>> (2 Corinthians 5:19), and: <<Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right">> (Acts 10:34-35).

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

Romans 11:13-14

Just in case his point has been misinterpreted Paul makes absolutely certain that the Gentile element in Rome have fully grasped what he has just said. That is, that within the divine purpose, their blessing not only contributes to but also depends upon the blessing of Israel.

As an apostle, Paul had a special calling and commission to preach the good news to the Gentiles. But he uses his ministry to the Gentiles also to benefit the Jews, for he hopes that the more the Gentiles come to salvation, the more this will provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that many will be saved. However, we might do well to recall that Paul was also sent to the Jews as commanded by Jesus in his instruction to Ananias: <<But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel">> (Acts 9:15).

Paul is very careful not to claim to be their apostle as he does with the church in Corinth: <<Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord>> (1 Corinthians 9:1-2). But what Paul does want to make clear is that he has the Gentiles best interest at heart despite his impassioned plea for his own people to come to salvation in Christ Jesus: <<Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. As for those who seemed to be important – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance – those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews>> (Galatians 2:3-9).

I make much of my ministry is frequently translated 'I magnify my ministry', and what Paul hopes to achieve is provocation by magnifying his ministry. In other words, Paul is explaining why he has not been content to work away on behalf to the Gentiles quietly and without fuss. They will no doubt be aware how much trouble his advocacy of Gentile freedom from the law has caused, both among the Jews and the Jewish Christians. He had made a public issue of it, fallen out with the other apostles over it, spoken out loud and clear over against those who regarded the Gentile mission as an aberration or an anomaly, or who would rather it was given no prominence at all! And he continues so to champion the cause of the Gentile Christians as a matter of deliberate policy, so that the Jews, not least those in Palestine, could not ignore it.

Arouse my own people to envy. Paul's aim in all this was to provoke the unbelieving Jews, who were after all his own people, to make them so uncomfortable over the success of the Gentile mission that they would be forced to recognise how God is working and how God's purpose of mercy is being effected among the 'non people' of the Gentiles. Paul evidently felt the tension in himself, the tension between his complete identity as a Jew and his conviction regarding the Gospel. His hope was to provoke a similar tension in his fellow countrymen, a tension between covenant nationalism and reports of Gentile blessing, which would be resolved simply by their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Paul's intention all along was to save some of them through this provocation that would lead to them accepting the truth of Jesus as the Christ.

Because the Jews had rejected the Gospel, the Gentiles were invited in (vv.11-14), but Paul uses the Jews' rejection as a warning to the Gentiles (vv.17-22). Verse 11 and v.14 are about invoking the Jews to jealousy because the Gentiles now appear to have the favour of God, which for so long the Jews believed to be their sole right and possession. Therefore, Paul hoped they might decide to accept the Gospel in order to return to God's favour and grace. Although there is a risk this might be done out of spite rather than a genuine heart for God, as we see in the story of Esau: <<Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realised how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had>> (Genesis 28:6-9). Esau had already married two Canaanite women: Adah, also called Oholibamah, and Basemath, which had also caused distress to his parents.

¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Romans 11:15

If this verse seems a little familiar that is because it is reemphasising the points made in v.12, where: <<but if their transgression means riches for the world>>, is put in different terms with their rejection, not only of the Cross but by God, is linked to their transgression, and the riches of the world being expressed in terms of reconciliation to God for all mankind.

If the rejection of the majority of Israel has meant that many Gentiles, i.e. the world, are now reconciled to God through Christ, then the acceptance of the Jews, i.e. their future coming to Christ in large numbers, will bring about the final resurrection, i.e. life from the dead, and the end of history, so that from that point on people will praise God forever and ever: <<Surely every knee will bow and every tongue will confess>> (Isaiah 45:23b CEB). Others think life from the dead is a figurative expression for great spiritual revival.

How Paul understood the divine rationale in all this is not clear. Was the casting off of Israel really necessary at this stage in salvation history? Why could the Gentiles not have come in without the bulk of the Jews being cast out, even if only temporarily? Paul's answer presumably might once again be in terms of the Cross; that it was precisely Israel's rejection of its Messiah, which was God's means of reconciliation, a reprehensible act by humans, but divinely willed for the world's good. But the dominant thrust of his overall argument suggests that he might also have maintained that it had become necessary to break the identification between covenant promise and Jewish nation, so long and so firmly established in Jewish self understanding, if the promise was to be indeed to all seed.

This approach achieves two key aims:

1. The rapid influx of Gentiles into the covenant family of God would allow them to see their own election in terms purely of grace.
2. It would allow the Gentiles to realise this was a true gift of God to all mankind and not just a bolt-on option for non-Jews.

In the casting off and bringing back of Israel, Paul is, in essence, retelling the Passion story but now not just in relation to Jesus, but now being played out on a larger scale, with Messiah's original chosen people, so that all the world may see what the cost to God is, i.e. he has given his Son and his people for the Gentiles that enables them to come into the family of God. It is no wonder Paul looks at his unbelieving kinsfolk with such sorrow, pain and indeed love. No wonder he looks at them with hope that some at least may still be

saved. He sees in their face the face of the rejected Christ, and in his glorious resurrection the possibility that they too may be welcomed back again.

Tom Wright says, 'let's give the story its proper conclusion, Paul seems to be saying let's settle this old jealousy once and for all. Once you learn to recognise God's hidden plan revealed in Jesus, all things are possible': <<Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" >> (Mark 10:27).

¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:16

Two illustrations are used here that on first reading teach the same truth. Initially, it may be that the firstfruits and the root probably refer to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the saving promises given to them. If the firstfruits and root are consecrated to God, so too are the whole batch of dough, and the branches, i.e. the Jewish people as a whole; Numbers 15:17-21, which states: <<The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat the food of the land, present a portion as an offering to the Lord. Present a cake from the first of your ground meal and present it as an offering from the threshing floor. Throughout the generations to come you are to give this offering to the Lord from the first of your ground meal>>, provides us with the OT origin of the imagery. As Paul has already explained in Romans Chapters 9-10, it does not follow from this that every Jewish person will be saved, but it does indicate that God will be faithful to his promises: <<It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel>> (Romans 9:6), and seems to imply that in the future many more, but not all Jews will be saved.

Just as the firstfruits offered to God make the whole crop holy, so too the offering of the Jewish people to the covenant promise makes them a holy nation: <<Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation>> (Exodus 19:5-6a). Surely they cannot now be regarded as unholy in the sense of being automatically outside God's people, unreachable by the Gospel, unable to share in faith in Christ Jesus?

Something else that is going on here stems probably from Paul's Pharisaic background; in Jewish tradition their temple offerings and tithe was for God and the rest for their own use. This had been extended to become their thinking that some of what they had was to be offered to God and rest was theirs to keep, as if it were some form of taxation. What the Pharisees had tried to instil in Jews during Paul's time was a way of seeing that everything belonged to God, but by making part of it an offering to God, he would then bless the whole to make it holy and then graciously allow the people to keep the remainder for themselves. It seems the thought that we are giving some of what we have to God rather than him graciously allowing us to keep a large proportion of what is actually his anyway is a prevalent thought in the church today as well. Perhaps we should bring back the Pharisaic way of thinking in the areas where it is needed!

The second way of reading the two metaphors, which, from the following verses, seems more likely to have been in Paul's mind, is not to see them in an historic perspective as described, but from an eschatological perspective. The first fruits would then be taken as those who had come to faith in Christ in the early stages of the faith being taken out around the world, giving a foretaste of the harvest still to come. This is something that will continue on throughout the era of church history. The second metaphor helps to remind the Gentiles that Israel is still the root of what God had planted. There is still a biological seed of Abraham to be reckoned along with

the spiritual seed from the grafted in branches. The overarching message of the Gospel is that it is for all; Jew as well as Gentile.

The last image of root and branches also provides Paul with the transition to the next paragraph, a more extended reflection on the relation of the different branches to each other and to the tree itself. Lest the Gentile believers think that the image of Israel as God's planting refers only to the Jews, Paul shows how the metaphor can be elaborated to include them. But lest the Gentile believers think God has now jettisoned the Jews, Paul leaves them in no doubt that the tree in question is Israel itself.

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,

Romans 11:17

The illustration of the root and its branches is elaborated upon in vv.17-24. The people of God are portrayed here as an olive tree, as confirmed by: <<The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken. The Lord Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked me to anger by burning incense to Baal. Because the Lord revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realise that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more" >> (Jeremiah 11:16-19), and: <<his young shoots will grow. His splendour will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon>> (Hosea 14:6-7). When Paul says some branches were removed, broken off it seems by some external force rather than the natural decay of the tree, i.e. God's punitive action against the Jews. Paul probably has this in mind and applies it to the majority of the Jews of his day. Paul also sees God's punitive action as justifiably severe otherwise he may have used a metaphor of the tree that is less severe such as withering or some form of blight.

Gentiles, as wild shoots, were grafted into the olive tree and now share in the root; promises made to the patriarchs and also the nation of Israel as a whole could be in Paul's mind.

They were grafted into the olive tree is a metaphor for the kingdom: <<But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever>> (Psalm 52:8), <<his young shoots will grow. His splendour will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon>> (Hosea 14:6), and: <<The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken>> (Jeremiah 11:16), the fruit useful for the honour of both God and man: <<But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honoured, to hold sway over the trees?' >> (Judges 9:9).

The Gentiles had been wild olives that produce bitter fruit but grafted into the true vine would produce sweet fruit, nourished by the root: <<I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing>> (John 15:5). The Jews had enjoyed being part of this tree, grown from the root but many were now branches broken off and thrown into the fire: <<If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned>> (John 15:6).

Normal practice would be to graft cultivated, fruitful branches or shoots into the wild strong growing but fruitless olive tree. Here, Paul reverses the commonly accepted practice as a warning to the Gentiles not to become complacent or prideful.

Paul makes four points from his analogy:

1. Unbelieving Jews have been chopped out of the tree, i.e. the family of God.
2. Paul really does see all people as a single family of God, established in Abraham and identified through belief in Jesus as the Messiah of God.
3. God will bring more Jews into the church as they are still his chosen people.
4. Paul warns the Gentile Christians not to make the mistake of thinking it is a Gentile-only church, or that it is theirs by ethnic origin, thus making the same mistakes the Jews had done from the beginning. Their fate would be the same if they make that same mistake.

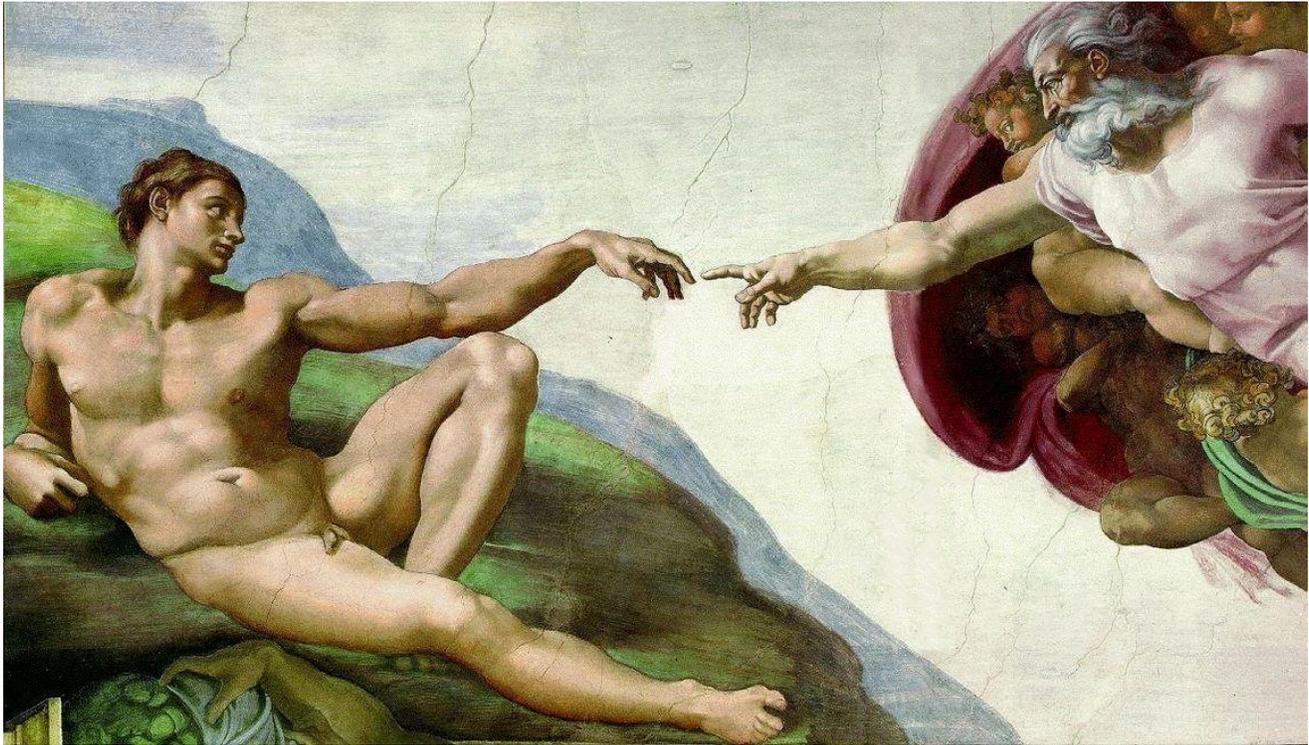
¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

Romans 11:18-20

Gentile believers are warned against arrogance, for it is God’s saving promises, i.e. the root, not their own goodness, that saved them. Thus Gentiles might be tempted with pride and arrogance because God removed the Jewish branches from the olive tree and grafted them in instead. But this should provoke fear and awe, the Greek word phobeō, which means to be afraid, have profound respect and reverence, or have fear of offending, for the Jews were removed because they failed to believe and the Gentiles remain only because of their continued trust.

Careful note should be taken that God has not planted a new tree. The tree remains; its root a secure foundation. God has not and will not abandon the Jews in favour of the Gentiles but remains Lord of all. The fact that the Jewish branches were broken off to allow the Gentile branches to be grafted in indicates that the Jews transgression was indeed essential in God’s plan to bring the Gentiles to saving faith. This in no way implies that God is giving the Gentiles a higher priority than the Jews, either then or now. It is not clear whether Paul was aware of the Gentile superiority in the Roman congregations at the time he wrote the letter. If he did know, then he may have had that fact in mind also. What Paul does not refute in his argument is the need for Jewish rejection as a presupposition of Gentile acceptance.

The other key aspect in this passage is for the Gentiles to remember at all times is that the Israelite branches were lopped off for their unbelief and the Gentile branches grafted in for their initial belief and acceptance. If they become arrogant and adopt the same erroneous attitude of election that Israel had done, they too can be broken off from the tree. The tree and its root are strong enough to sustain all the branches of those who continue in God’s way but it involves human response at all times. God holds out his hand continuously but it requires the same response from all humankind if they wish to be part of the tree of life. A half-hearted, limp-wristed response like Adam’s in the Michelangelo’s image is insufficient.



You stand by faith. This is an exhortation in the mould of those he had offered to the church in **Corinth**: <<Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand>> (1 Corinthians 15:1), <<Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong>> (1 Corinthians 16:13), and: <<Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm>> (2 Corinthians 1:24).

²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Romans 11:21

Fear is the appropriate response, for God will not spare anyone who does not continue to believe, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Fear here does not refer to a paralysing fear. Rather, it is the kind of humble fear that does not take God or salvation for granted, or think lightly of his displeasure.

What Paul is saying is that the appropriate response for the Gentile believer is not pride in status, but fear; fear of the Creator and Judge, whose response to the pride and presumption of the creature will always be one of wrath and condemnation. This is what so many Jewish branches have found to their cost.

²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

Romans 11:22-24

Paul presses home his point in a way which recalls the double aspect of God's electing purpose: <<Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God

unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory>> (Romans 9:13-23), and shows still more clearly how fundamental that earlier exposition was for his resolution of the dilemma of Israel's failure to respond to the Gospel. The Gentile readers must contemplate God's kindness and sternness. His severity has been the portion of Jews who have not believed, but his kindness has been poured out on the Gentiles. Still, they must persevere in faith. Otherwise, they too will be judged as unbelievers. Furthermore, God will graft back onto the olive tree any Jews who put their faith in Christ. Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. If God grafted onto the olive tree Gentiles, who are the wild branches, then surely he can and will graft back onto the olive tree Jews, who are the original branches from the tree.

Paul warns them not to be proud or boast (vv.18-19) either about themselves or against the Jews, for they were not grafted in and the Jews cut off for any merit of their own. Instead, they should have a reverential fear of God: <<Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it>> (Hebrews 4:1), for they stay in the vine only as long as they stay in Christ; like the Jews, they too can be cut off. The Jews lost their privilege for they cared not for Abraham's covenant, but that they descended from him biologically. Therefore, they had right of tenancy in the vine that he was the root. But with Christ as the root they forfeit the right of tenancy through their unbelief: <<"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?" Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit>> (Matthew 21:41-43). Throughout history God has punished those whom had his favour and then rebelled against him: <<"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins">> (Amos 3:2). The downfall of the unbelieving Jews was their lack of faith for which God withdrew his free grace, which is his to give or to withdraw in all righteousness. He had then gifted it to the Gentiles, but Paul warns them to keep themselves in the love of God in order to retain his grace and favour: <<Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days>> (Hosea 3:5).

Paul also points out that rather than look down on the Jews for their exclusion, and these are the people who were giving Paul such a hard time and were seeking his death, that there would actually be great rejoicing in heaven at one lost sinner being returned to the fold: <<I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent>> (Luke 15:7), and a son returning home to his father: <<But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found>> (Luke 15:32). This is the grafting in again of v.23.

Here, Paul underlines the precariousness of the Gentile believer's situation; precarious because the history of Israel shows how quickly faith can be corrupted into unfaith, how easily grace can be perverted into human presumption. Individual Gentile Christians should not assume that what has happened to them is something final and irreversible; the only security derives from a sustained and unreserved reliance on God's grace alone.

Not surprisingly, given Paul's train of thought, the conclusion to his extended metaphor of the olive tree of Israel is a reversion to the hope of his countrymen's restoration to their former place within God's covenant purpose. Not only can the Gentile branches be lopped off again if they turn from faith to unfaith, but the old branches can be grafted back in again, if they were to turn from unfaith to faith. For God is able to do it. Paul recognises how far his exposition is straying from the metaphor, but the horticultural impossibility becomes a way of emphasising the power of God. Here again, grace needs only faith as the opening through which it can pour its life giving energy to revitalise even branches withered by Israel's false assurance. For if God can perform the physiological impossibility of making Gentiles full members of the covenant people, seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise, how much more easily can the natural seed and heirs be reincorporated into what is actually their own people and their own inheritance? Once again, Paul implies clearly, what he has in mind is by no means a wholly new beginning, but rather a concept of the people of God whose basis and character has been obscured by Israel's misunderstanding, is being discovered afresh through the Gospel not least by the Gentiles, and will shortly be re-established among the rest of Israel as well.

Paul's writings here could be taken in two ways. At the time of writing Jews were returning to Rome after a period of exile and they were finding many of the Gentiles in Rome were unsympathetic towards them and there was plenty of evidence in that society of anti-Semitism. Paul is warning them not to let go of the principles of the Gospel, that is, to believe it is a new faith based on a Gentile church. A second possibility is that this is a prophetic writing warning us of the anti-Semitism that has so blighted the church throughout its history from Paul's time onwards, perhaps even starting in the church based in Rome. Paul often emphasises that Christ is Lord of all and that in him there is neither Jew nor Greek, all are God's children. Again, it is worth stating that there is no place for racism or any other form of discrimination in any church bearing the name of Jesus.

V.c.ii [Romans 11:25-32 - All Israel will be saved](#)

So far there has been a degree of hesitancy about the arguments pursued by Paul, as though he had been only exploring answers to the pressing problem of Israel's failure. But now, as he moves into the last section, the tentativeness disappears, and the argument takes on a note of full-blooded conviction. What he had posed simply as a hypothesis on Romans 9:22-23 <<What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory>>, and more definitely as a possibility of divine power in the sequence of 'if' clauses here in vv.12-24, he now states as an assured fact. Having so carefully encouraged his readers to recognise the possibility of God's mercy and wrath working together to effect his larger purpose, he now claims boldly that this possibility is what God is actually doing.

There are some people in the world who see God as someone to be feared, who is destructive, cruel, always looking for people who do wrong just so that he can punish them. They fail to see his grace, mercy and love, and the patient endurance he has shown throughout history. There is another group who only see God as a source of love and kindness, and seem to forget just how much he hates sin and evil, and that he is committed to confronting it in full force for the sake of justice and righteousness. It is perhaps worth looking at v.22 again in this light: <<Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God:

sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off>>. *God's love abounds but it carries with it responsibilities on the recipient to receive it with as much grace and truth as it was given.*

²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:25

Paul discloses a mystery to the Gentiles to prevent them from being proud. The word mystery does not necessarily refer to something puzzling or difficult to grasp, but to something that was previously hidden and is now revealed. The mystery here has three elements:

1. at this time in salvation history the majority of Israel has been hardened;
2. during this same time the full number of Gentiles is being saved; and
3. God will do a new work in the future in which he will save all Israel (v.26), but refer to the later note.

The mystery he now invites them to share is precisely the confirmation of the possibility already envisaged. Israel has experienced a hardening in part. Paul does not attribute the hardening here to God, but in the light of what he has already said he does not need to. In this summary fashion the mystery of the dark side of election is again affirmed, and again with firm reference to Israel itself. The blindness is partial as both temporary and as afflicting what Paul hopes will in the end be a relatively small proportion of his people.

Brothers. Paul uses the Greek word adelphoi so it can easily be read as brothers and sisters. More importantly, Paul is showing a unity here between his Jewish past and his continued love for his countrymen and for his new found Gentile brothers through their shared heritage of faith as part of the body of Christ.

You may not be conceited. Paul is aware of the tendency the Jews had had of focusing too much on themselves. This is something that Paul considered would also happen to the Gentile and possibly the Jewish Christians as the church grew. The words of King Solomon seem appropriate once again: <<Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil>> (Proverbs 3:7). The Jewish Christians would readily assume what is not actually stated in the metaphor, that they were original branches of the olive tree which had not been broken off. Either way, Paul's concern is to remind them, once again, of the danger of lapsing into the sort of pride and presumption which, in Paul's view, had cost the majority of their Jewish contemporaries so dearly.

Israel. In some translations it speaks of all of Israel but Paul has already made it clear that not all who are from Israel are Israel, i.e. the genetic Jews are not automatically part of the Israel of God, as it is the spiritual family of Abraham who is the true Jew, the true Israel, which now includes Gentiles as well. Elsewhere, Paul calls them the Israel of God: <<Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God>> (Galatians 6:16).

Until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. The punitive action by God against unbelieving Israel is limited to a specific purpose and period. What has previously been expressed in terms of salvation (v.11), riches (v.12), and reconciliation (v.15), is now expressed in terms which echo the typical Jewish hope that in the last days there will be a mass conversion and pilgrimage of the Gentiles and reformed Jews to Zion: <<In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the

word of the Lord from Jerusalem>> (Isaiah 2:2-3). What is certain is there will be the full number of the Gentiles, the full measure intended by God, but just how many that would be Paul does not say; all, many, or just some; Paul is content simply to specify that it is all that God will call.

²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

Romans 11:26

Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20-21 but again modifies the text to suit his purpose. This will be discussed in a comment after v.27.

In this way all Israel will be saved, would be the fulfilment of Paul’s heartfelt prayer for his nation. Various interpreters have claimed that Paul is speaking of:

1. the salvation of the church of Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, throughout history; or
2. the saving of a remnant of Jews throughout history; or
3. the salvation of the end-time generation of the Jewish people in the future.

The first view is unlikely since, throughout Chapters 9-11, Israel and Gentiles are distinct ethnic entities. Furthermore, in v.25, Israel refers to ethnic Israel, and it is difficult to see how the referent could suddenly change in v.26. Finally, v.28 indicates that ethnic Israel is still distinguished from Gentiles, for ‘they’ in v.28 clearly refers to ethnic Israel.

The third view that Paul refers to, the salvation of Israel at the end of history, seems most likely because:

1. it fits with the promises of God’s future work in v.12 and v.15;
2. it is difficult to see how the salvation of a remnant of Jews all through history would qualify as a mystery;
3. the future salvation of ethnic Israel at the end of history accords with the climactic character of this passage; and
4. it demonstrates finally and fully how God is faithful to fulfil his saving promises to his people: <<It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel>> (Romans 9:6).

All Israel does not necessarily refer to every single Jewish person but to a very large number, at least the majority of Jews.

The deliverer coming from Zion almost certainly refers to the Christ: <<and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath>> (1 Thessalonians 1:10), suggesting that the Jews will be saved near or at the Second Coming of Christ. In v.26, Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20-21. Whereas Isaiah refers to Christ as the redeemer, Paul calls him the deliverer. Christ has clearly redeemed the whole world by paying the ransom for all sin and satisfying the righteous justice of the Father. But Paul sees him now taking us from the place where we were still in our sin and moving us on to deliver us to a place where we ourselves will one day be righteous, just as he is righteous, for: <<we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is>> (1 John 3:2b).

The fact he will come from Zion could either refer to Jesus’ obvious historic link with Jerusalem, or perhaps that his Second Coming is his descendancy from the heavenly Jerusalem, the new city. Interestingly, this is the only occasion in Romans that Paul refers to Christ’s

Parousia. Paul could no doubt assume that it was a well known element in the new movement's teaching, which needed no fuller exposition in this summary dealing with a different issue.

In Isaiah's time, the Messiah was yet to come and so he states that he will: <<come to Zion>>, but for Paul, the Christ had come and now his grace, mercy and deliverance: <<come from Zion>>, and is spreading to the whole world. Isaiah similarly speaks of the teaching of the Gospel going out from Zion in Isaiah 2:3 <<Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem>>, and to confirm this, Jesus instructs his disciples to start their teaching in Jerusalem: <<and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem>> (Luke 24:47), <<But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth>> (Acts 1:8).

Again, the quote in Isaiah Chapter 59 indicates that the promise is to Jacob first, that their iniquity might not be their ruler and that all ungodliness might be removed from them. If they return to the Lord he will draw them back to him no matter where they are in the world: <<and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you>> (Deuteronomy 30:2-3). Those that do turn from sin will be owned as the true citizens of Zion: <<Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household>> (Ephesians 2:19), the right Jacob: <<He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob>> (Psalm 24:4-6). God's gracious intentions concerning Israel were made the matter of a covenant, which the God, who cannot lie, could not but be true and faithful to; and is so according to his own will.

Israel will be grafted back into their own olive tree with Christ as the root (v.24), called the saving of Israel in v.26 <<And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved>> (Acts 2:47b). One of the wonders of God's free grace is that, even here where we see the Jews being lost to God, the door is left open for them to return. God does not bear grudges as a man might.

Israel is a holy nation: <<you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites>> (Exodus 19:6), with the church descended from holy parents, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, chosen by God, a holy seed. Therefore, although some of the individual members of that church, the branches, were now cut off from the holy root, the root remains and new branches can grow, and so the nation of Israel can remain a holy nation with new branches grown from the holy root, which is Jesus the Son of God: <<Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength>> (Deuteronomy 4:37). It is part of God's grace to show the children of Israel kindness for the sake of their fathers. David calls this God's kindness: <<The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet">> (2 Samuel 9:3), which David showed for the sake of a father. Although the church may have been built on the strength of the Gentile acceptance, when the appropriate time comes God will remember his promises to the fathers, i.e. the Patriarchs, of his chosen nation: <<I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land>> (Leviticus 26:42). The iniquity of the fathers is kept but for 3 or 4 generations, whereas his mercy is kept for thousands.

We must not forget that God has the power to remove their obstinate unbelief if he so chooses, for he has almighty power to do as he will. Therefore, he has the power to graft them back into the vine in the same way as he had the power to raise Jesus from the dead: <<and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms>> (Ephesians 1:19-20), or **make dry bones live**: <<He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life>> (Ezekiel 37:3-5).

Those that have found mercy themselves should endeavour that, through the mercy they have been given, others also obtain mercy. Therefore, Gentiles brought to salvation through free grace should be willing to reach out to those Jews, who are now outside the church of God, to bring them back into the fold by persuasion that they might also receive the same free grace once again. After all, true grace hates monopolies.

27 **And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."**

Romans 11:27

When I take away their sins. The salvation of Israel fits with God's covenantal promise to save his people and to forgive their sins.

Verse 27 probably comes from Isaiah 27:9 <<By this, then, will Jacob's guilt be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin: When he makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces, no Asherah poles or incense altars will be left standing>>, **although Jeremiah 31:33-34** <<"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more">>, **may also apply in the context, which lays the foundation of all the blessings of the new covenant**: <<For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more">> (Hebrews 8:12).

In quoting Isaiah 59:20-21 in v.26 and then Isaiah 27:9 here, Paul catches hold of two other still more strikingly characteristic features of the faith and hope cherished by many Jews. The one is the confident hope that in the last days the dispersed of Israel would return to the Promised Land and those who had fallen into error would be restored to righteousness. The other is the emphasis, unusual in Paul, but deliberately heightened by the fusion of the two Isaiah passages, on God's forgiveness of sins. This is all the more noticeable because it is not Paul's own preferred way of expressing the Gospel, i.e. he never speaks of forgiveness as such on his own account, and in his letter at least, sin is usually a personified power; Paul here shows himself to be well aware of the strong Jewish assurance that the covenant God of Israel is one 'who takes away sins': <<maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation">> (Exodus 34:7), and: <<'The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation'>> (Numbers 14:18), **just as he forgave the sins of David**: <<Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit>> (Psalm 32:1-2). **There is no suggestion here or anywhere else in Romans that Paul accused his ancestral faith of teaching the need to earn salvation, or to merit forgiveness. On the contrary, Paul himself**

affirms on his own behalf the basic Jewish conviction that in giving the covenant to Israel, God had made provision for the covering of sins, and that God would manifest his covenant faithfulness in the last days by rescuing Israel from its impiety and taking away its sins once and for all.

The inclusion of the Gentiles is now envisaged as preceding the restoration of Israel and in such a way that the Gentiles' inclusion is educative of Israel, establishing not Israel's superiority but the character of God's election. It is precisely this transposition in order of precedence which, Paul hopes confidently, will make Israel see that the covenant is a matter of grace and faith throughout, not of nationality or cultic ritual, and not something designed to bring renown to any particular nation or city as such. Perhaps this is the point of Paul's alteration of the phrase about Zion (v.26). Israel has precedence in salvation history which no one can contradict or deny, but Israel has no claim on an eternal primacy; the deliver comes from heavenly Zion, but not for the sake of earthly Zion. It is thus precisely because Israel's hope has been so transformed by the Gospel that Paul can take up this characteristic Jewish language at the last: his hope for Israel, even when expressed in traditional terms, is a hope transformed by the coming of Christ, by the reassertation of grace, and by the inclusion of the Gentiles already under way.

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,

Romans 11:28

Gospel is concerned; election is concerned denote the two main phrases of the divine purpose, or more precisely, a defining characteristic of each phrase. The Gospel is Paul's watchword for the phase introduced by Christ, the phase of Gentile outreach and Jewish disobedience. The election characterises the phase of God's commitment to Israel, only apparently suspended during the time of Gospel outreach and Gentile inclusion, but, in fact, still sustained in the remnant, and soon to be fulfilled in its character as an election of grace.

Enemies; loved. At this time God counts the bulk of Israel as his enemies. In part at least, Paul will refer here to the hostility of most of traditional Judaism to the movement which sprang from Christ Jesus; Paul of all people could hardly avoid thinking of that: <<as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless>> (Philippians 3:6), and: <<For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judæa, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last>> (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). But probably this main thought is again of the divine initiative, as regularly referred to in this chapter. Israel's present languishing under divine disfavour is on your account, for a reason not part of the revealed mystery, the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles, which has depended on Israel's rejection of it and on God's cutting off the Jewish branches. But at the same time, seen from the perspective of election, the same Israel is and always will be loved by God.

On your account. The unbelief of Israel has benefited the Gentiles, i.e. this is the period of history in which Gentiles are being saved, while most of Israel remains in unbelief. But God's electing promise given to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be fulfilled in the future.

²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29

Here, we see the gifts and call of God are irrevocable or without repentance, where repentance is sometimes taken as a change of mind. Therefore, God never repents for he is in one mind and who can turn him? Sometimes for a change of way, and that is here understood, intimating the constancy and unchangeableness of that love of God which is founded in election. Those gifts and callings are immutable; whom he so loves, he loves to the very end. The word translated repentance in the KJV is used elsewhere and translated grieved in the NIV, e.g. <<The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain>> (Genesis 6:6), and: <<I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all that night>> (1 Samuel 15:11), where God was grieved to have given man a being and to have given Saul the kingship of Israel respectively. But we never see God 'repenting' or grieving that he had given a man grace or effectually called him; those gifts and callings are without repentance or regret, and are therefore irrevocable.

Israel will be saved because God never revokes his saving promises. Gifts, the Greek word charisma, means things freely given by God, and the word can be used to refer to different kinds of gifts. Sometimes the word refers to spiritual gifts for ministry as in: <<I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong>> (Romans 1:11), <<We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith>> (Romans 12:6), and: <<There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit>> (1 Corinthians 12:4), and sometimes to the gift of salvation: <<But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification>> (Romans 5:15-16), and: <<For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord>> (Romans 6:23), but the context here favours yet a third kind of 'gift', namely, the unique blessings given to Israel which Paul mentioned at the beginning of this long section: <<the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen>> (Romans 9:4-5).

His call, the Greek word klēsis, using the same root as Greek eklogē, i.e. elect or election in v.7 and v.28, as well as in Romans 9:11 <<Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand>>, refers here to calling to salvation, as confirmed in v.24, and in: <<And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified>> (Romans 8:30).

³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

Romans 11:30-31

Disobedient to God. The previous situation has now been totally transformed. The Gentile members of the Roman congregations have now received mercy, and have done so as a result of Jewish disobedience. Paul is here not merely repeating in summary fashion the argument of vv.11-15, but doing so in what some of his fellow Jews would regard as deliberately provocative terms. For the tables have now been completely turned; Jewish assumption of monopoly on divine mercy and of Gentile exclusion through disobedience has been turned on its head. Gentile disobedience did not disqualify from mercy, and, irony of ironies, what did 'qualify' the Gentiles was Jewish disobedience. Paul's confident hope is that the fact of disobedient Gentiles receiving mercy will shock his fellow Jews into recognition that their obedience is in fact

disobedience to the word of faith, i.e. they had been obedient only to the works of the law. By coming to see that their exclusive claim to God's covenanted mercy was what was actually disqualifying from that mercy, they would become open once again to receiving that mercy as sheer mercy, mercy to the disobedient.

Salvation history is structured to feature God's great mercy. God saved the Gentiles when one would expect only the Jews to have been saved, but in the future he will again amaze all with his grace by saving the Jews as well, so that it will be clear that everyone's salvation is by God's free grace and mercy alone.

The final now in the text does not mean the promise to the Jews is now fulfilled but that the promise of Jewish salvation could be fulfilled at any time.

³² For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Romans 11:32

The word all here refers to Jews and Gentiles, i.e. all without distinction, not all without exception.

The sin and disobedience of both Jews and Gentiles is highlighted, to emphasise God's mercy in saving some among both Jews and Gentiles.

The last verse of this section seems at first glance to be a summary of summaries, but once again it is Paul tightly packing so much into just a few words. In fact, in just a few words, Paul seems to summarise the whole theme of the letter:

1. God's wrath was a handing over of man to his own desires and passions.
2. God's justification of the ungodly.
3. The sustained use of the characteristic Jewish terminology of mercy and obedience into this last verse underscores the claim implicit throughout the first half of the letter and developed most fully in Chapters 9-11 that Israel's peculiar covenant privileges, summed up as God's mercy to Israel, have been extended to all. Now, at last, we can see the argument of the whole letter set within the full sweep of salvation history.
4. The twin aspects of God's purpose of election are reaffirmed in one final breathtaking summary - wrath as well as grace, severity as well as kindness, hostility as well as love, confined to disobedience as well as subject to mercy. The history of Israel, as much as that of the Gentiles, reveals the pattern of God's dealings with mankind, shows that it is necessary to recognise both faces of God, if any sense and continuity of purpose is to be found in history, and confirms that it is possible to contain the most negative of situations within a faith in the one God.
5. No less striking is the absence from the final summary of any mention of human faith.

V.d Romans 11:33-36 - Doxology

As he concludes his setting forth of God's great plan in the history of salvation (Chapters 1-11), Paul breaks forth into praise. God's wisdom and ways are far beyond the understanding of human beings, and hence he alone deserves all the praise and glory.

Paul had encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he had been taken up into heaven, in a vision at least, and he had received such in-depth understanding of the Gospel through divine and not human teaching, and yet he clearly professes to be at a loss as to how to understand the glorious mysteries of God and all that he stands for. If such a man as Paul is at a loss then the rest of us have no chance of making sense of it at all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?”
35 “Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?”

Romans 11:33-35

Man’s wisdom and knowledge, if he has any, are shallow and it is easy to see the bottom but God’s are deep (v.33), and bottomless: <<Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain>> (Psalm 139:6). Therefore, his judgements are just, true, pure and righteous: <<Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne>> (Psalm 97:2). Not that we always know or understand them: <<Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen>> (Psalm 77:19), and: <<But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him>> (Job 23:8-9), although there will come a time when we shall: <<Jesus replied, “You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand”>> (John 13:7). But for now the mystery remains: <<He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted>> (Job 5:9 and 9:10), except for that which God chooses to reveal: <<The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law>> (Deuteronomy 29:29). And so it is with the casting off of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles; the calling of some and the rejection of others. If it is not for us to know then it is not for us to ask.

The words of Isaiah 40:13 in v.34 teach us that no human being knows the mind of the Lord apart from revelation, and no one can serve as God’s adviser. Likewise the majestic words of Job 41:11 in v.35 are a reminder that no one ultimately gives anything to God. Instead, everything humans have is a gift from God: <<For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?>> (1 Corinthians 4:7).

It is natural then for Paul to ask who has known the mind of the Lord? Paul had also asked this question rhetorically of the Corinthian church: <<“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ>> (1 Corinthians 2:16). The gap between God and man, between Creator and creature is so vast that there is no way for us to know unless God chooses to reveal it to us. This he does normally through the Spirit that indwells us or through revelations in scripture, and he informs us sufficiently to know contentment and to do his will: <<The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them>> (Psalm 25:14), and: <<I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you>> (John 15:15).

Who has been his counsellor is probably taken from Isaiah 40:13-14 <<Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counsellor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?>>. God needs no counsellor for he is all knowing and all seeing. Anyway, the Trinitarian Godhead is complete and perfect; as a community, they can provide their own counselling for God is One: <<Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD

is one>> (Deuteronomy 6:4), and: <<But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases>> (Job 23:13).

Paul continues in v.35 to challenge anyone to say that God owes him a debt for anything. As David puts it: <<"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand">> (1 Chronicles 29:14). This again will counter any objection the Jews might legitimately have that the Gentiles had now been given what the Jews previously had 'owned'. For God has only taken what is his, and it can be as freely taken away as it is freely given; especially from those who did not want to receive it. Also, the Gentiles may not boast at what they have accepted, for it was given to them by the same free grace and through no merit of theirs. In fact, they were so far from God, it seems a wonder that it was even offered, except that it is the true nature of God's grace to do so.

36 **For from him and through him and to him are all things.
 To him be the glory forever! Amen.**

Romans 11:36

Since all things are from God, and through God, and for God, it follows that he deserves all the glory forever; God's saving plan brings him great honour, praise, and glory forever and ever.

Paul concludes this doxology with praise that shows the perfection and all-sufficiency of the Godhead: <<All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you>> (Psalm 145:10), <<"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being">> (Revelation 4:11), and: <<In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!">> (Revelation 5:12).

The final verse indicates in a triumphant sweep of thought, everything we are comes from God. Everything we have comes from him. Everything that exists, the whole of creation, is his handiwork and is sustained in existence by his power and love. Everything we do traces itself back to his presence as the sovereign one before whom all human work and activity is, at best, loving service.

This kind of all embracing statement of God's universal sovereignty is always in danger of ignoring the obvious problems; the world as we see it, and humans as we see and know them, including of course ourselves, show plenty of signs that all is still not well. Many have said in our own day, as they said in Paul's, that, if the world as we presently experience it, is all directly traceable to a single God then, to put it mildly, it looks as though God has good days and bad days, for although some parts of his world are very good, others are a bit less so, while others are seemingly downright bad, or at least are made to appear so by the humans that live there. But Paul has dealt throughout this letter with just these problems. Romans, as a whole, has been about the saving, restorative justice of God. It has taken on board the fact, not only of universal human idolatry, disobedience and sin, but also the corruption of which all creation has been subjected to as a result. This letter, above all other writings in early Christianity, wrestles with exactly these problems in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, and the eternal free and gracious gift of the Spirit, and demonstrates that God has been true, both to creation, and to covenant, and that this faithfulness will work its way out; in fact, is already working its way out, to the point where we can see the end from the beginning.