



# ROMANS

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*The “full inclusion” of the believing Jews and the “fullness” of Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus will be saved together as the ONE ISRAEL OF GOD.*

## THE STORY’S HAPPY ENDING

### HAPPY ENDINGS

We measure stories by how they end, don’t we? Fairy tales often look, for all the world, like they will turn out badly. Snow White eats the poisoned apple and the dwarves grieve. Cinderella must stay home from the ball while her evil stepsisters have all the fun. But in the end, there comes a change in fortune, and they both live “happily ever after.” The allure of such stories is that they touch something we all deeply desire and, we know, sometimes HAPPENS!

In the movie *Schindler’s List* (based on a true story!), German businessman Oskar Schindler rescues 1,100 Jewish people from certain death at Auschwitz by purchasing their freedom. In the larger picture of the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis, they were only a small handful, a mere “remnant” out of the millions who perished. Schindler himself weeps that he could not save more. But those who were rescued look back with gratitude. They lived! After several hours in black and white, the movie ends in living color, as scores of present day Schindler Jews file past Schindler’s grave to express their thanks.

The story of the Jews is a tale that has lasted for centuries. The Jewish people have endured unspeakable horrors, even to this present day. Paul wrestles in Romans with their eternal destiny. In Romans 11 he dares to hope that for some (perhaps many) of them, the story will have the happiest of endings, a rescue that finally overcomes both death and hell. Paul believes in the triumph of God’s mercy. That’s better than any fairy tale!



**THERE IS A REMNANT!***ROMANS 11:1-10*

Paul asks again what he (and we) have wondered about for the last two chapters. “Has God rejected his people?” (v. 1). He had seen first-hand how many of his countrymen had refused Jesus as their Messiah and had opposed his message and mission. His answer is unequivocal. “By no means!” Paul is convinced that God’s final verdict is mercy and that the story will end well.

He cites three pieces of evidence. The first is Paul himself! For he too is a Jewish Christian, and if God did not cast off a blasphemous persecutor of Christians and of Jesus (Acts 9:4), surely He will not cast off Israel as a whole! The second is a quote: “God has not rejected his people.” Those words are from 1 Sam. 12:22. There, after the Israelites express remorse for having desired a king, Samuel comforts them, saying, “The Lord will not forsake his people.” The third is the story of the prophet Elijah in his flight from angry Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1–18). All alone at Mt. Horeb (Sinai), Elijah laments the apostasy of Israel: “I alone am left, and they seek my life.” In answer to Elijah’s misery, God reveals a comforting truth: “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Like a latter-day Elijah, Paul discloses to his readers a wondrous truth: “So too at the present time there is a remnant...” (v. 5).

The key word in the Elijah example is “remnant.” Always God has preserved a “remnant.” Isaiah announces that, though few in number, a “remnant” will return from the Babylonian captivity (Is. 10:19–22). In fact, one of Isaiah’s own sons is named Shear-Jashub, which means, “A remnant shall return” (Is. 7:3). Jeremiah promises that God will gather a remnant from where He has scattered them and bring them home, where they will multiply (Jer. 23:3). Micah says the same, comparing the remnant to a flock of sheep safe in a pen (Micah 2:12). Once again Paul sounds his keynote that this is all “by grace” and “no longer on the basis of works” (v. 6).

Alongside this “remnant,” Paul sees another group he calls simply “the rest” (the ones who did not believe in Jesus), who are “hardened” even as resistant Pharaoh was hardened (9:17–18). Martin Franzmann summed up God’s response to Israel’s stubborn unbelief this way: “God petrified them in their stony resistance to the truth...because of their unbelief.” Paul cites the Old Testament (Is. 29:10), saying that “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day” (v. 8). Then another quote (Ps. 69:22–23) in vv. 9–10: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened.” The “table” reference has been debated by scholars. Some think it refers specifically to the table for showbread in the temple, something on which the Jews continued to rely even though Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice had rendered that table and the whole temple system obsolete. Others, including William Barclay, see it as a general reference to people sitting contentedly at a table, feasting with a sense of security that is ignorant of their spiritual peril.

So there is a remnant, and there are “the rest” who will not believe. How will this story end?

**A BLESSED CHAIN REACTION***ROMANS 11:11-16*

In v. 11 Paul begins to outline what Paul Harvey called the “rest of the story.” The Jews have certainly “stumbled” in their unbelief. Was that God’s intent, simply to make them fall? Again comes the very strong “By no means!” Instead, says Paul, God has begun a blessed chain reaction that will eventuate in a happy ending. Here is the sequence:

- a) The Jews stumble in their rejection of Jesus, their Messiah.
- b) Their stumbling opens a door for the Gentiles to hear and believe.
- c) The salvation of the Gentiles makes Israel “jealous”!

This is, to some degree, the pattern that continually unfolded in Paul's ministry experience! Take for example the moment in Antioch (Acts 13:44–46) where, after the initial outreach to the Jews and their resistance, Paul famously said, "We are turning to the Gentiles!"

Paul dares to hope that because of the outreach to the Gentiles, the end of the story will be what he calls the "full inclusion" of the Jews (v. 12). For the first time in Romans, Paul addresses the Gentiles directly: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (v. 13). As we read the words in this section, we can sense Paul asking the Gentiles if they will desire what he desires: "to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them" (v. 14). Can they see what he sees: "their acceptance" will mean nothing less than "life from the dead?" (v. 15).

There follows immediately two metaphors to explain the hope in the Jews' story. First Paul speaks of "dough offered as firstfruits" (v. 16), a reference to Num. 15:17–21, where God commanded the people to offer the first batch of dough (for bread) to Him. Then, "and if the root is holy, so are the branches." Both metaphors say the same thing. The firstfruit batch is holy, and so therefore is the whole lump. The root is holy, and so therefore are the branches. Do you see, you Gentiles, what God has in mind for His chosen people, the Jews? A small portion (a sort of firstfruits) have believed for now. Someday more will accept the Gospel. Can you see it? Do you Gentiles hope as I hope? As God intends?

## THE WONDROUS OLIVE TREE

### *ROMANS 11:17-24*

But that is too simple. The message to the Gentiles is not only an appeal to share Paul's care for the Jews. It is a sober warning against spiritual pride in the process. So Paul takes the second metaphor, the root and branches, and develops it at length into the full-blown picture of the olive tree, which was "the most useful tree in the Mediterranean world" (Barclay) and a lovely picture of Israel. Hosea prophesied, "[Israel's] shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive" (Hos. 14:6). Jeremiah observed wistfully, once you [Israel] were "a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit" (Jer. 11:16). Even today, the olive tree is a familiar image on Israeli postage stamps!

In Paul's portrayal, the tree's roots are the patriarchs to whom the ancient promises were made and whose faith "supported" (11:18) all who came after. The "natural branches" (v. 21) are the Jews themselves, many of whom did not accept the message of the Gospel and so were "broken off" (v. 19). The Gentiles are "a wild olive shoot...grafted in" later (v. 17) by God's grace.

The intent of this picture is, first, to help the Gentiles appreciate the grace of God, which grafted them in to the tree. The reason anyone is in that tree, Paul stresses, is not human effort, but God's "kindness" (repeated three times in v. 22!). Second, it reminds them of the debt of gratitude they owe the Jews, the "root that supports you" (v. 18). Finally, it warns the Gentiles against a pride of place. "Do not be arrogant toward the branches" (v. 18). Away

with any notion of superiority! On the contrary, “stand in awe.” God’s grace and wrath are meted out equally to Jews and Gentiles: “If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you” (v. 21)! What would prevent such severity? It will happen “provided you continue in his kindness,” explains Paul. “Otherwise you too will be cut off” (v. 22). Straight talk about a life-and-death matter.

At the end of this paragraph comes a rich dose of hope: “Even they [the Jews], if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again” (v. 23). In the face of our puzzlement over “hardens whomever he wills” (9:18) and “vessels of wrath” (9:22), Paul plays this amazing trump card, the pronouncement of God’s intended mercy. There is ONE TREE, not two. The heart of that tree, wrote Pelagius, is “the richness of Christ.” There is but one people of God, joined in Him, as Paul will proceed to make clear.

### HOW “ALL ISRAEL” WILL BE SAVED

#### ROMANS 11:25–27

Paul now lifts the veil on God’s design for Israel as history unfolds. Drum roll, please! “I want you to understand this mystery.” In Paul’s day the word was used by the so-called “mystery religions” for something that was to be revealed only to a select group of initiates. Paul, on the other hand, uses it to refer to something that was formerly hidden but now revealed by God for all to know and understand (noted in *Concordia Self-Study Bible*). In Ephesians, as here, that mystery “is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:3–9 NIV).

Here in Romans, Paul furnishes more detail about the mystery, clarifying the role Israel’s unbelief plays in the continuing drama. “A partial

hardening has come upon Israel” (v. 25). Paul furnishes an explicit time when the hardening will end, “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” The word here translated “fullness” (*pleerooma*) and applied to the Gentiles was the one he used in v. 12 and applied to the Jews (“full inclusion”).

Now comes the conclusion of the matter. “And in this way all Israel will be saved” (v. 26)! This astonishing phrase has led to many interpretations, including:

- a) All ethnic Israelites of every age will be saved.
- b) The great majority of the Jews at the end of the age will be saved.
- c) The elect from every age, both Jews and Gentiles, will be saved.

Some have anticipated a mass conversion of Jewish people to the Christian faith, though Paul’s words about “some of them” being saved (v. 14) and “if they do not continue in their unbelief” (v. 23) temper that expectation.

What Paul has finally done is to re-define “Israel.” Already he made clear that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (9:6). The extended picture of the olive tree has made clear God’s design. The “full inclusion” of the believing Jews and the “fullness” of Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus will be saved together as the ONE ISRAEL OF GOD.

As he has done more than a dozen times in Romans, Paul undergirds his proclamation with “as it is written.” The quote that follows from Is. 59:20–21 and Is. 27:9 is the announcement that the long-awaited “new covenant” in Old Testament expectation has arrived at long last. “Ungodliness” will be banished “from Jacob” (v. 26) and God will “take away their [Israel’s] sins” (v. 27).

*The summary word for all of it is “mercy.”  
Four times in three verses he says it.*

### IN SUMMARY, “MERCY”!

#### *ROMANS 11:28-32*

The blessed consequence of all this plays out in the present, says Paul. If what I have said is true, he appeals, these unbelieving Jews, though “enemies” of God, are truly “beloved” (v. 28). Do you Gentiles love them as God does? Remember that His “gifts and... calling... are irrevocable” (v. 29 — literally in Greek “without regret”!). His hands are still “held out” to them, even in their unbelief (10:21).

The summary word for all of it is “mercy.” Four times in three verses he says it. You Gentiles, once disobedient, received mercy (v. 30). The Jews who now are disbelieving may yet receive mercy because of that mercy shown to you (v. 31). Finally, wonderfully, he summarizes the three chapters in one climactic verse: “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (v. 32). There is no more discussing or debating, but only praise for such a God!

### A DOXOLOGY IN 3/3 TIME

#### *ROMANS 11:33-36*

The final verses of the chapter are just that — a grand doxology and a literal “Amen.” One can almost hear the music begin in 3/3 time. Paul composes a “trio of triads” to praise the Lord. Have a look!

Three nouns: “Oh, the depth of the *riches* and *wisdom* and *knowledge* of God!” (v. 33)

Three rhetorical questions:

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?”

“Who has been his counselor?”

“Who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” (vv. 34-35)

Three prepositions: “*from* him and *through* him and *to* him are all things” (v. 36)

As the late *Lutheran Hour* speaker Ozzie Hoffman might have said, “What more is there to say but ‘Amen’?”

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

## ROMANS 12:1-21

*Lord God, what would You have me do with my life? As I plunge in to study once more, preserve me from making this merely an academic exercise! Help me instead to listen for the Word You would speak to me, and then obey it. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

For review:

1. What is sad about the word "remnant"? What is happy?

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2. Review the olive tree picture and explain its parts.

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3. Summarize what Paul is saying in Chapter 11 to the Gentiles in his audience.

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Romans 12:1-2

4. Describe for your small group what form "worship" takes in your life.

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5. The Old Testament is filled with directions for sacrifice as part of worship. What does Paul mean by urging us to present a "living" sacrifice (v. 1)?

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6. According to verse 2, what is the difference between being "conformed" and being "transformed"?

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7. Are you "conformed" or "transformed" in the following areas?

- a) Possessions
- b) Time Use
- c) Entertainment
- d) Conversation topics

Romans 12:3-8

8. Do you think too highly of yourself, or not highly enough? Why?

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9. Where do you go to get an accurate reading on yourself?

- a) The mirror
- b) My family
- c) The doctor
- d) The pastor's office
- e) My golf/ pinochle/ sharing group

10. Romans 12 contains one of several “gift lists” in the New Testament. How many gifts are enumerated in vv. 6–8? What are they? Besides merely listing the gifts, what does Paul stress?
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11. Compare this list with those in 1 Cor. 12:4–11 and 1 Cor. 12:28. How do the Corinthian lists differ from this list in Rom. 12?
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- Romans 12:9–21
12. “Love” for most people is an emotion. But beginning in verse 9, Paul lists not emotions but actions love takes. Read through the list and select three that you think are directed especially at you just now. Share with your small group.
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13. Paul devotes considerable space to the notion of vengeance. What do you learn about this issue from Lev. 19:18; Prov. 20:22; and Matt. 5:38–42?
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14. Why do you suppose Paul spends so much time on this subject?
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15. Who is on your “enemies list” just now? No sharing details unless you choose – but do pray about this!
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16. With the word “therefore” in 12:1, there comes a change from a detailed summary of Christian doctrine to a detailed directive for the Christian life. How will you implement this chapter in your life, starting this week?
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**Memory Verse Challenge for Chapter 12 (your choice):**

Rom. 12:1 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Rom. 12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*