

There is to be a Future Restoration for Israel (11:11–24)

In Romans 10 Paul had told us that Israel heard the gospel, yet as a whole they had rejected the Messiah. Nevertheless, God has not rejected them (11:2). Throughout Israel's history, God has always preserved a remnant of ethnic Jews (11:5) through election by grace (11:6), so the continued existence of Israel as the people of God is certain.

The burden of Paul in Romans 11 is the salvation of Israel—not only "some of them" (11:14), but for the whole people. Verses 25b–26 explain Israel's present condition and its future: "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved." The reason this is so important is because if God isn't faithful to Israel, it is questionable whether He will be faithful to us. But our connection to Israel is even closer than that: Israel is the root into which the Gentiles have been grafted.

11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

11:12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

In Romans 11:11 and 12 the antecedent to the pronouns ("their" & "they") must refer to Israel as a whole, not just to those who are hardened.

In verse 1 Paul said that God has not rejected Israel, but many had been hardened (11:7–10). That is their present condition. What about Israel's future? Did they stumble beyond recovery? In verse 11 Paul assures us that Israel's failure to believe is not final. Though the Jews have stumbled, they did not fall. That is, their present rejection of Christ is not irrevocable ruin. Israel will rise again. The rest of the chapter will be to prove this point.

The Jews' stumbling over the Messiah was a spectacular failure; it was a calamity, a national disaster. Nevertheless, it benefited the other nations, for it was through Israel's rejection of the gospel that salvation has come to the Gentiles (Cf. Jn. 1:11; Acts. 13:46; 14:1; 18:6:19:8ff.; 28:28; Isa. 49:4–6; Ro. 1:16).

At the same time, the Gentiles' reception of the gospel will benefit the Jews, for it will make them jealous and prompt them to seek salvation (Ro. 10:19). As Christians enjoy the blessings of Israel's God through their Messiah—as they experience joy, peace, and other fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit, as they love and care for each other in a way that the world does not, and as they face tragedy and even death with assurance that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ—the Jews will be envious and drawn to Christ.

Not only that, if the fall of the Jews has resulted in so much good to the rest of the world, how much more spectacular will it be for the world if the nation is restored!

Thus “the blessing ricochets from Israel to the Gentiles, from the Gentiles back to Israel, and from Israel to the Gentiles again. Of these stages the first has already taken place; it constitutes the ground on which the second and the third may confidently be expected to follow” (Stott, 295).

**11:13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,
11:14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.**

Paul’s ministry was focused on Gentiles, but he was also conscious that it was through his preaching to the Gentiles that the Jews would come to faith through the jealousy the gospel provoked. Paul’s ministry is therefore magnified because it reaches both Jews and Gentiles.

This also explains Paul’s methodology; wherever he traveled he went to the synagogue first, for he believed that the gospel was for the Jew first and also to the Greek (Ro. 1:16).

11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Verse 15 takes up the idea of verse 12 and establishes Paul’s claim in 13 and 14. The implication of verses 15 and 16 is that the future salvation of Israel is demanded by the past election of Israel.

The meaning of the phrase, “life from the dead” is uncertain. Is it literal resurrection, spiritual resurrection, or figurative? As John Murray states, “The restoration of Israel will have a marked beneficial effect, described as ‘life from the dead.’ Whatever this result may be it must denote a blessing far surpassing in its proportions anything that previously obtained in the unfolding of God’s council” (Murray).

In sum, in verses 11 and 12 Israel’s failure resulted in salvation (or riches) for the Gentiles. Yet Israel’s fullness is called a *much greater blessing*. What this will be we are not told. Then, in verse 15 Paul sees the blessing that comes from Israel’s salvation as something that so far surpasses anything previously experienced it can only be likened to life out of death!

Since Paul is talking about the historical reconciliation of Israel, this is probably a reference to an event in history as well—perhaps the blessing that will come to the world is the second coming of Christ when he personally establishes His kingdom upon the earth.

God is not finished with Israel. The blessing of the world is set forth by her destiny.

11:16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

Paul mixes metaphors—bread and an olive tree.

The term “holy” has two meanings. (1) It means to be consecrated, set apart, or devoted for the service of God. (2) It also means to be morally pure. In the former sense it is applied to persons, places (e.g. Jerusalem), and things (e.g. the temple and its contents), almost without number in the OT. This is the

meaning that Paul had in mind. Because the nation of Israel was God's covenant community, it was called holy (i.e. it was set apart for God's service) even when the nation was morally corrupt or unbelieving. Israel's failure to live up to its calling did not change that fact that God had set it apart from the other nations. The two metaphors in verse 16 teach that if one portion of the nation is holy (set apart by God), the rest is too; it is precisely for this reason that Paul was confident that the nation would someday be saved (cf. 11:25).

In ancient times bread was made daily. Each day, a piece of dough was saved and stored in a cool place so that it could be mixed into the following day's dough. Once mixed, the leaven from the portion that was saved quickly spread through all the dough. If the first piece of dough was holy, the entire lump was holy for they were one entity. Likewise, the roots and the tree cannot be separated from each other. If a portion of the tree is set apart, the rest is too. In both metaphors the point is that what is true of the part is true of the whole. This can also be said of Israel.

The question is, what does the first piece of dough and the roots refer to, and what are the lump and the branches? The most plausible explanation is that the first piece of dough and the roots are the patriarchs of the Jewish nation (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The covenant that God made with them was also to their descendants (the lump and the branches). Because the patriarchs were holy (set apart from the nations, and dedicated as a special possession of God), their descendants are, too.

Therefore, though the Jews were in a state of unbelief, their restoration is to be expected because of their special relationship to God through the patriarchs. There can be no permanent rejection of Israel. "They stand now, therefore, and ever have stood, in a relation to God which no other nation ever has sustained; and, in consequence of this relation, their restoration to the divine favor is an event in itself probable, and one, which afterwards Paul teaches (11:25), God has determined to accomplish" (Hodge, 367).

Thus, Paul's confidence that one day all Israel will be saved is implied in the original election and covenant commitment made to Israel at the beginning. "In other words, Israel's holiness—her being chosen and set apart for God at the beginning—implies that in the end this people as a whole will be holy, that is, will trust Christ and belong to God as a saved part of the one true people of God . . . If God chose the forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and set them apart for Himself with the everlasting covenant promises, then the present enmity and hardening and stumbling does not nullify that original intention. God has a future for corporate Israel. Someday the whole lump will be holy, and someday the tree will include an entire generation of Jewish branches" (Piper, sermon on Ro. 11:13–24).

***11:17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree,
11:18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.***

The branches that are broken off refer to those among Israel whose hearts are hardened and have rejected Messiah. They represent the partial rejection by the nation. The branches of the wild olive are a reference to the Gentiles. They are "contrary to nature" (11:24) for they do not naturally belong to the

stem into which they are grafted. The tree is the nation of Israel (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6) whose root is in the patriarchs. The stem represents the nation's continuity through the centuries (Stott, 299). The tree possesses the promises of God given to the patriarchs that all the branches share.

From this illustration we see that the church is not a separate tree, nor does it come from separate roots. God's redemptive plan is one plan, not two. Furthermore, the branches that are grafted into the tree do not replace the tree nor do they ever become natural branches; they are wild branches who are enjoying the blessing of the rich root of the olive tree. Thus, the single tree with the mixture of branches includes all the redeemed (both Jew and Gentile).

The Gentiles' in-grafting, however, could tempt the Gentiles to look down upon the Jews for their unbelief, but it must not be forgotten that God's attitude to the Jew has not changed. The Gentiles must not forget that their salvation is dependent upon God's choice of Israel; Israel is not dependent on them (11:18b). They are enjoying the promises that God made to the patriarchs (cf. Eph. 2:11–22) and are indebted to Israel as the tree that supports them.

A warning now follows. The Gentiles who have been grafted in are in danger of repeating the sin of the Jews by boasting of their privileged position.

11:19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

11:20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;

11:21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you."

Some Jews have been broken off from the blessings of salvation because of their unbelief. But this does not leave room for the Gentiles who replaced them to boast. God did not graft the Gentiles in because of their superiority. They were grafted in because of the grace of God. Therefore, the Gentiles should be thankful and cautious for they are not in a more secure position than the Jews were. If God rejected some of the Jews because of their unbelief, the Gentiles will fare no better if they fail to believe.

In 11:20 Paul says we stand by our faith. In other words, our life, our salvation, our remaining in this tree of covenant and promise and hope, depends on our persevering faith. Then he says, "Do not be conceited, but fear."

Fear plays a very important role in the Christian's life in relation to maintaining faith. The reason to fear is because "if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you." If we turn to unbelief and stop trusting Christ then we will be cut off. When unbelief starts to creep into our lives fear makes us run to Christ.

11:22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Paul, therefore, commands us to look at both the kindness and the severity of God. To look at only the kindness of God or just the severity of God is to have a distorted view of God. God is kind. God is severe. Behold both!

Those among Israel who rejected God will experience the severity of His judgment. But the Gentiles should not think that they will always be in His favor. God never made a covenant with them securing His blessing. They will experience His kindness if they continue in faith. Those who reject the Savior will, like the unbelieving Jews, also be cut off from His blessing. In other words, the continuance of God's blessing among the Gentiles depends upon the response of the next generation.

But this also applies on an individual, personal level. Ongoing faith is indispensable in being saved and fear plays a key role in helping us maintain faith. As Paul says in Philippians 2:12, "Work out your salvation with *fear* and *trembling*." According to Romans 11:22, we are to look at the kindness of God and *the severity of God* (11:22). That is, we should look at the mercy of God but not forget the wrath of God; the present experience of the Gentiles and Jews can just as easily be reversed; the Gentiles could become objects of God's severity and the Jews the objects of His kindness, as verses 23 and 24 state.

11:23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again.

11:24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

The reception of God's favor is contingent upon belief. If the Gentiles turn from faith they will face God's severity just as the Jews did. But the opposite is also true; if Israel turns to God in faith and embraces Christ, they will be grafted in again. This is not unreasonable for if God is able to graft wild branches into cultivated root stock, He can surely graft the natural branches back in.

Conclusion:

The Jewish people are a chosen nation. No other nation holds such a privileged position. The OT is full of verses where God tells Israel that His covenant with her is eternal. The following are a few examples.

- Ezekiel 16:60 yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and *I will establish for you an everlasting covenant.*
- Ezekiel 37:26, "I will make a covenant of peace with them. *It shall be an everlasting covenant with them.* And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore."
- Isaiah 55:3 Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and *I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.*
- Isaiah 59:21 "And as for me, *this is my covenant with them,*" says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, *"from this time forth and forevermore."*

Jesus is the means by which the fullness of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant come to pass. Although the New Covenant in Christ's blood includes both Jew and Gentile, God continues His relationship with Israel as a nation. Romans 11 cannot be explained in any other way. If the church

replaced Israel, there would be no need to speak of God's future dealing with the nation or continue to differentiate between Jews and Gentiles. But Paul still sees God's work with the nation as not yet complete.

This should influence the way we look at the Jewish people. We are not just to see them as a people who rejected the Messiah, but as a select nation that God is preserving. We should be grateful that the Savior came from them and understand that their resistance to the gospel is the means that God used to graft us into the tree. We are to look for a day when God will be glorified by turning the nation to their Messiah. We are to live before the Jews in such a way that the grace of Christ in us is so attractive that it makes them jealous—our compassion and concern for them should be so apparent that they are drawn to the Savior.