

# Romans: Chapter Eleven

## **Romans 9.1-11.36: SOVEREIGNTY (Righteousness Rejected)**

The nation of Israel had largely rejected the gracious overtures of God in the gospel (10.18-21). The obvious question is therefore, 'Has God finished with Israel?' **No!** Romans 11 gives *ten* clear reasons why there is glorious future for Israel whilst God presently deals in grace with the Gentiles. Paul is keen to show that God's sovereign purpose in salvation for Jew and Gentile exalts His *mercy* (11.30-32) and *glorifies* His Person (11.33-36). Note. This chapter is not about the church. It concerns God's dispensational dealings with Jew and Gentile.

### The Remnant of Grace (11.1-10)

**v.1:** On the basis of Paul's condemnation of Israel and their response to the gospel (9.30-10.21), the question that must be answered is whether God has fully and finally disowned His people Israel. God forbid! With promises based on the immutable word of God, this is as impossible as the sun and moon ceasing to shine or measuring the heavens above (cf. Jeremiah 31.36-37). **Proof 1: The conversion of Paul.** He was a true Israelite, and yet by the grace of God had been saved. He was a personal testimony to the ongoing saving power of the gospel with Jews. In fact, Paul's conversion was a picture of the future salvation of the nation. He was once marked by zeal for God without knowledge (10.2), but a meeting with the glorious, resurrected Christ resulted in his conversion and a ministry which spread the gospel to Gentiles far and wide. This is just as it will be for Israel. The nation will be converted at the return of Christ to the earth, and through their ministry all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 18.18; 26.4). **v.2: Proof 2: God's foreknowledge.** God has not 'cast away' His people which He 'foreknew' (1 Samuel 12.22; Psalm 94.14). Israel's present rejection of the gospel did not take God by surprise. He remains faithful to them *because* He chose them as His own, despite a perfect knowledge beforehand of all their faults, failures and falls (Amos 3.2).

**Proof 3: A remnant.** Paul cites the historical example of Elijah (1 Kings 19) to show that despite Israel's general failure, God has always had a faithful few (remnant). **v.3:** In a like situation to the present day, Paul shows that Elijah even pleaded *against* Israel speaking of their rebellion and apostasy in killing God's prophets and tearing down His altars. **v.4:** But God revealed to Elijah that he was not alone. There remained 7,000 that belonged to God and had not bowed in worship to Baal. **v.5:** Paul draws the comparison with the present day. Just as there was a remnant that remained faithful to God in Elijah's day, so there was a remnant that had been saved and secured by the grace of God in Paul's day. **FB Hole:** *As a nation Israel had despised grace and sought for righteousness by law-keeping, only to miss it and to be blinded. Bowing to grace the remnant had been saved.* **v.6:** The remnant had been saved by grace and so, logically, salvation cannot be by works. **v.7:** Israel, generally speaking, sought after a right standing before God on the basis of works (9.31-33; 10.3) – and this they could not obtain. But, the 'election' or 'remnant' (v.5) obtained it by grace through faith in Christ. What about the rest of the nation? They were judicially 'blinded' (*poroo*, hardened). *Poroo* has the sense of turning slowly to stone, figuratively becoming dull, obdurate and insensitive to God's word. This was Israel's punishment for repeatedly refusing the gospel. **v.8:** Paul quotes three witnesses from the *Law* (Deuteronomy 29.4), *Prophets* (Isaiah 29.10) and *Psalms* (Psalm 69.22-23, vv.9-10) to describe the present condition of Israel. They were in a state of spiritual deadness because they would not see (or *perceive*) what God had done for them, neither *hear* the truth of their very own Scriptures and prophets. **v.9:** In Psalm 69, David prays that God might deliver him from unjust persecution and bring disaster on his enemies. God had brought the same on unbelieving Israel. They were in such a hardened state, that even their spiritual blessings ('table', possibly the altar or sacrificial system) which should have led them *to* Christ instead became a stumbling block to keep them *from* Christ. **v.10:** Their eyes were darkened that they could not see the goodness or truth of God (cf. 1.21). Their backs were bowed, either in bondage and fear of their enemies or under the general burden and slavery of the law. This is the sad state of a people who had long abused their many blessings and rejected the word of God.

### The Reasoning of the Apostle (11.11-15)

Paul uses these verses to explain Divine purpose in the stumbling of Israel. It will, in fact, further God's plan for salvation history, first for the Gentiles, and ultimately for the Jews. It is this cyclical point that Paul will make repeatedly through to v.32. **v.11:** So, has Israel *stumbled* at justification by faith in Christ (cf. 9.32, 11.7) with the purpose that they should *fall* beyond recovery, being irrevocably lost? God forbid! **Proof 4: Salvation for the Gentiles.** Through Israel's 'fall' (rejection of the gospel), salvation has been offered to the Gentiles (see Acts 13.44-47; 14.1-3; 18.4-7; 19.8-10) with the design to make them 'jealous' of such blessing for others. Israel had provoked God to jealousy by their strange gods, now God provokes them to jealousy with those 'which are not a people' (Deuteronomy 32.16, 21). **Harold St John:** *The Jewish train has been shunted into a siding and the church express comes thundering through and the Jew says, 'I wish I were on that'.* **vv.12, 15:** But, God's purpose is that not only Gentiles, but ultimately the Jews themselves would benefit

from their own stumbling. The argument is as follows: If Israel's rejection of the gospel has resulted in the 'riches' of salvation and 'reconciliation' being proclaimed to the Gentile world, how much more blessing will there be when Israel is ultimately and nationally restored? It will be 'life from the dead', probably symbolic language for worldwide blessing and regeneration in the millennium (Isaiah 27.6, Matthew 19.28), or else a reference to literal resurrection (as in 46 of 47 references to *ek nekron* in the NT) which will follow Israel's national restoration at the second coming of Christ (Daniel 12.1-2; Revelation 20.4). Jonah is a typical foreshadowing. *The casting aside of Jonah into the sea resulted in the blessing of a boatload of Gentiles. The restoration of Jonah resulted in the blessing of a city of Gentiles.* **vv.13-14:** In explaining his personal role in the plan, Paul speaks to 'you Gentiles' as a corporate group. He took great pride in his ministry to them in order that he might provoke jealousy amongst his own people that 'some' might be saved.

#### The Root of the Olive Tree (11.16-24)

**v.16** is transitional, using two *parallel* metaphors to illustrate the ultimate restoration of Israel. Since the 'firstfruit' and 'root' are holy, then it follows that the 'lump' and 'branches' must partake of the same holy character. The metaphor of the olive tree is then developed through the section. The 'firstfruit' and 'lump' (dough) is likely a reference to Numbers 15.17-21 (see also Leviticus 2.2-3; 23.9-14). Bread was to be made from the first part of the grain harvest and offered to the Lord. As this firstfruit was set apart (consecrated) to Him, the rest of the dough must also be holy. 'Firstfruit' is often used by Paul to describe the first converts in a region (16.5), thus here it *may* represent the remnant. Their salvation is the earnest of Israel's national conversion in a future day (v.26). But, it seems Paul is using two *parallel* metaphors. In the second, the 'root' is a clear reference to Abraham and the Patriarchs (v.28) and so the same is probably true of the firstfruit. The lesson is clear. **Schreiner:** *Israel is not cast off but still remains the elect people of God because of the promise made to the fathers (vv.28-29).*

**v.17: Proof 5: The olive tree.** The olive tree does not symbolise the church, or salvation. It represents God's *testimony* or *light-bearers* (oil) in the earth. This began with Abraham and continued with Israel until the time of Christ. There is *blessing* and *privilege* (fatness) associated with such a position. Note. The illustration does not speak of the spiritual blessing of individual believers, but the dispensational change in God's ways which has put rebellious Israel under judicial discipline and brought Gentiles into a place of favour and opportunity in connection with the gospel (FB Hole). The branches (Israel) sprang from Abraham, but 'some' of them did not demonstrate the same character of faith. They had *natural* but no *spiritual* links. They were therefore broken off through unbelief (v.20), a process which began at the cross and continued through the Acts. Consequently, the gospel went forth to the Gentiles (Acts 13.42, 46; 28.28) and those who heard it were grafted as a wild olive branch in to the place of divine favour and grace. The blessing (fatness) of the root, Abraham (i.e. justification by faith), had now come *towards* the Gentiles in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3.14).

**v.18:** The appropriate response of the Gentiles was not to 'boast' (pride) or consider themselves superior to the Jews, but to 'fear' (v.20). How could they boast when Abraham (the root) sustained them (the wild branches)? It was only through God's gracious promises to Abraham and his posterity that the Messiah had been born and the gospel had come to the Gentiles at all (John 4.22). **v.19:** The Gentiles could not either be so arrogant as to believe they deserved this place of privilege. **v.20:** Yes, Jewish branches were 'broken off' through unbelief, but the Gentiles' continuing place in the olive tree depended upon their response in faith to the gospel (Acts 28.28). Gentiles must therefore 'fear' – i.e. stand in reverence before God. **v.21:** For if He broke off the natural branches (Jews) through unbelief, He could much more easily do the same with wild branches (Gentiles). **v.22:** We do well to take note of the 'goodness' and 'severity' of God. The Jews experienced God's strict justice (severity) as they were judicially blinded for unbelief. The Gentiles had known God's kindness (goodness) as salvation was proclaimed to them through the gospel. But, if the Gentiles turned from and rejected the gospel, as the Jews had done, they too would be cut off and face the judicial consequences. **DE West:** *It must be understood that this place of privilege, apart from repentance and personal faith, brings no vital union with Christ, and will not therefore save those who are in it from the righteous judgment of God. The goodness of God has long been extended to many who have not believed the gospel and have not confessed Christ as Lord and Saviour. To them His severity must yet be made manifest.* **v.23:** But, all was not lost for unbelieving Jews. If they turned from their unbelief, God was willing to graft them back into the place of testimony and privilege. Of course this will be the case in the millennial kingdom when Israel will again be God's great testimony bearer on the earth (Zechariah 8.23). **v.24:** Now, the Gentiles must heed this warning. Those who had the privilege of hearing the gospel had been cut out of the 'wild olive' and graft in *unnaturally* to the 'good olive'. How much *easier* it would therefore be to graft the 'natural branches' (Israel) back in to the good olive should they repent. Privilege in spiritual things brings great responsibility.

### The Restoration of Israel (11.25-32)

**v.25:** Paul now clearly states what he has hinted at throughout the preceding verses. **Proof 6:** Israel's blindness is not permanent. Paul has been addressing a Gentile as representative of the whole (v.17). Now he addresses the Gentile believers in Rome specifically. They were not to be ignorant of 'this mystery' (truth once hidden now revealed) lest they become proud and boastful in their attitude towards the Jews. Israel's blindness was both **partial** and **temporary**. *Partial* in the sense that not every Jew was judicially blinded – some had been saved. *Temporary* because their blindness is 'until' the full number of Gentiles is saved. This will take place at the manifestation of the Lord Jesus, not the rapture. The church, and therefore the rapture, is not in view in Romans 11. Until the return of Christ to the earth, the *house* of Israel remains desolate (Luke 13.35); the *city* of Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles (Luke 21.24) and the *people* of Israel remain blinded (Romans 11.25). **v.26: Proof 7:** 'All Israel' will be saved at the time of Christ's manifestation. It is 'all Israel' in contrast to the *remnant* of the present time. All *living* Israel<sup>1</sup> (not every Israelite of all time) will be saved *physically* (being rescued from their enemies) and *spiritually* (turning ungodliness away from Jacob and taking away their sins) through repentance and faith, on the basis of the new covenant (**v.27**). It seems that the unbelieving of the nation will have died during the tribulation (Ezekiel 20.38; Zechariah 13.8-9; Micah 2.12-13; Romans 9.27), thus all that is left is a believing remnant. The means of their salvation is the Deliverer, Christ Himself. Israel's future is thus secure based on past Old Testament prophecy (v.26); present New Testament mystery (v.25) and a future new covenant yet to be made with Israel and Judah (v.27; Jeremiah 31.31).

**v.28:** The remaining verses of the section summarise the teaching of the chapter. **Proof 8:** God does not change His mind. Israel's present rejection of the gospel has alienated them from God's favour, but brought Gentiles into blessing. Nevertheless, God chose Israel to be His people (Deuteronomy 7.6-8). His love for them remains strong because of the unconditional promises He made to the patriarchs. **v.29:** Despite Israel's present failure and unbelief, God remains faithful to His promises. His 'gifts' (promises, cf. 9.4-5) and 'calling' (election) of Israel will not be revoked. God will not rescind His promises; He will not change His mind. The Jewish nation has a glorious future. **v.30: Proof 9:** The mercy of God. The basis of God's blessing of Israel is 'mercy'. In the past the Gentiles did not believe God, but are now enjoying the mercy of God in the gospel through the Jews' unbelief. **v.31:** The present mercy (salvation) enjoyed by the Gentiles will ultimately result in the merciful restoration of Israel (cf. v.25). **v.32:** God has 'concluded'<sup>2</sup> all in unbelief (cf. Galatians 3.22). The entire world, without *exception*, are guilty of disobedience, with no possibility of escape by human merit. Consequently, God offers mercy through the gospel to all without *distinction*, both Jew and Gentile alike.

### The Riches of God (11.33-36)

The faithfulness and wisdom of God has been clearly demonstrated in His purposes with Israel and the Gentiles. Every question has been answered. God is clear of every charge. Thus, Romans 9 begins with a man *weeping* but by Romans 11 the same man is *worshipping*. Theology has become doxology (an ascription of praise). These verses also form a final proof of a future for Israel. **Proof 10:** The wisdom and glory of God.

**v.33:** First, three *qualities* of God's Person are described. His **wisdom** is *inexhaustible* (infinite depth and richness); His **works** (judgments) are *inexplicable* (unsearchable); His **ways** are *incomprehensible* (past finding out). **vv.34-35:** Second, three *questions* (from Isaiah 40.13 and Job 41.3) are asked to emphasise God's unsearchable greatness. Apart from the revelation of Scripture, who could know God's mind or advise Him in His purposes? No one has ever given anything to God that He might be obligated to them. He is no man's debtor. **v.36:** Finally, three *qualifications* are made concerning God's eternal purposes. All things originated *from* God (*ek*, source), *through* God (*dia*, agency) and are *for* God (*eis*, purpose). All glory, praise and honour is due to Him. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 'All Israel' occurs frequently in the OT. It often refers to Israelites as a representative whole, e.g. Deuteronomy 1.1; 2 Samuel 16.22.

<sup>2</sup> *Synkleiein* has the thought of enclosing fish in a net (Luke 5.6). Paul may mean that God has given mankind over to the consequences of the sin they have chosen (Romans 1.24, 26, 28).