

A Study of
Romans 11

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Introduction

Most Bible students acknowledge that the book of Romans is fundamental in outlining God's plan of salvation (i.e. the gospel). Many, however, seem to be confused regarding Israel's role within this plan of salvation. Notice the following brief outline of Romans:

- Chapters 1-8: The problem of, and solution for, **world**-wide sin
- Chapters 9-11: The position and purpose of the **nation** Israel
- Chapters 12-16: Applications for the **individual** Christian, illustrating what Christ's salvation looks like

From Genesis to Revelation *the nation Israel* plays a central role in God's plan of salvation for the world (Gen 12:3; Rev 21:1-5, 12; 22:2). Many today believe that the Christian Church has been formed mostly of gentiles (i.e. non-racial Israelites) and that they have replaced racial Israelites as a new spiritual Israel [Gal 6:15-16]. On the other hand, the same people who believe this also hold that the Jews in the state of Israel today are still God's chosen people, and that they will yet play a significant role when Messiah returns a second time. May God shed His light upon this contradictory, confusing view.

As we shall discover in this study, God does not have one role for *converted gentiles* now, and another role for *converted Israelites* later. The Old Scriptures do not foretell of Israelites being converted by gentiles, but rather of gentiles being converted by *spiritualized*, racial Israelites. Repeatedly, the Bible declares that the gentiles would be converted by Israel after their Messiah came and redeemed them.

Why is there such a confusion about *spiritual* Israel and *physical* Israel? Are there two different Israels, one spiritual and another physical? As a matter of fact there are, but it is not the same two different Israels that many imagine! This is the very issue being expounded by Paul in Romans 9-11. Notice the bold and conclusive statement in Romans 11:26 regarding *all Israel* being saved, not just some of them. The confusion lies in the fact that both the spiritual and physical Israelites that Paul distinguishes in these chapters *were gentiles at one time*, even though they *were all racial descendants* of Jacob-Israel. How could it be otherwise? **Can anyone who is without Christ be considered anything but a gentile** (i.e. a foreigner to God)? In Romans 9:25-26, Paul quoted the prophet Hosea who plainly stated in chapter 1 that Israel committed spiritual adultery, was divorced by God, and became “not my people” (i.e. gentiles). Hosea added, however, that in the future they would be *adopted* back as “the sons of the living God” (See Rom 9:4).

The two different factions of Israel (i.e. spiritual and physical) is the subject at stake in Romans 9-11. ***The elect*** of Israel had believed in their Messiah, and ***the rest*** were blinded (Rom 11:7f, 25) until He returned a second time (Rom 11:26). This study is dedicated to chapter 11 since it is the climax of chapters 9-11, but it will also refer to chapters 9 and 10 from time to time for clarification and confirmation.

Romans 11

Verse 1...

*“I say then, Hath God cast away **his people**? God forbid.
For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham,
of the tribe of Benjamin.”*

Who are “*His People?*” They are obviously Israelites (of Judah and Israel) as the context of Romans 9–11 confirms. Also see Romans 9:3-6, 13, 24-27 (+ Hosea 1:9-11); 10:1, 19-21; & 11:2f, 26-27, 32.

“*Has God cast away His People?*” Since the Bible clearly declares that God *did* cast away Israel (2 Kings 17:18-23), it is obvious that Paul was inferring... *Did God cast away Israel... forever?* Undoubtedly, Paul was simply echoing **Jeremiah’s** heart cry in Jeremiah 33:24-26:

“Have you not considered what these people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD has chosen, He has also cast them off? Thus they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation before them. Thus says the LORD: If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them”
(Jer 33:24-26 NKJV).

Why did Jeremiah write this passage? He wrote it because, during his day, many in Israel had lost hope through a lack of faith in God’s promise to redeem them out of their lost estate (i.e. “not my people” or gentiles).

Jeremiah was not the first prophet to confront God’s faithfulness in not forsaking His People. In Exodus 32:1-14 we find the account of Israel’s awful idolatry with the Golden Calf. After this occurred, God tested **Moses’** faith in His unconditional promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

of never forsaking them. Moses answered God in Exodus 32:32 saying, “...*If Thou will not* [forgive Israel], ***blot me... out of thy book...***” Moses’ faith stood the test as he believed that God would not forsake Israel.

About 1500 years later, we hear similar words repeated by **Paul** in Romans 9:3... “***I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants... and the promises...***” These are not only similar words, they were motivated by exactly the same principle: If God is unfaithful regarding His promises to Israel, Paul wished to be cast away from Christ! Why? Because if God would not, or could not redeem ALL His People, Paul’s faith in Christ was unjustified and in vain.

Returning to Romans 11:1, why did Paul repeat Moses’ and Jeremiah’s concern regarding God forsaking His People now that the Messiah had come and the Christian church was born? He repeated it because Israelites had looked and waited for their Messiah, expecting Him to redeem **ALL of them** as their prophet Ezekiel proclaimed in Ezekiel 37. At the time Paul was writing this letter, however, only a few of them had become Christians. The question of whether God would restore ALL Israel or only a few of them arose because they had not yet grasped the two different *Comings* of their Messiah. The first time He would come to restore *the elect* of Israel (a small remnant of chosen vessels, Rom 9:28; Isa 10:20-22; Mat 24:22), and later He would come a second time to recover *the rest* of Israel (the remaining larger remnant, Isaiah 11:11-16; Heb 9:28; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Jude 1:14).

In Romans 11:1, Paul clarifies that he is an Israelite, and assures his readers that *he* is not “cast off” since he has been

restored by Christ. It is apparent that Paul's burden in Romans 11 is regarding the majority of Israelites that had not yet received their Messiah.

To understand this vital 11th chapter, one must continually bear in mind that Paul is comparing **two different groups within Israel**, namely *believers* and *unbelievers* (referred to as *gentiles*). One ought never to confuse these two groups with Judah and Israel, or Jews and Gentiles even though they are indeed a part of the two groups. Rather the two groups are believers and unbelievers *from among both Judah and Israel* (or Jews and Gentiles).

Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul asked the same question in their day. **What about us today?** Do any Christians believe that God is still forsaking His People today? While they may quote such promises as 1 Samuel 12:22 and Hebrews 13:5 that state God's promise never to forsake His People, and while they still believe that today's Jews will eventually be restored when the Messiah returns the *second time*, most do not believe that His first Coming has accomplished much salvation for Israel. Why do they believe this?

Did Israel's prophets foretell of the Messiah coming to save Gentiles first? No. Yet, even though the Messiah came over 2000 years ago, the majority of Christians today believe that He has not begun to redeem *Israel*, contrary to Luke 1:68-75. Instead, they think that He is saving Gentiles (non-Israelites) *first* in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy. **What do you believe?** The remainder of this study is intended to shed light on this subject.

Verse 5...

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

From among whom was this *remnant* chosen? It was chosen from *among Israel*. Who are these few faithful souls that Paul refers to as an **election** (chosen) by grace among Israel? They are Christians; they are Israelites; they are **Christian Israelites**. That is, they are the first Israelites to have been redeemed by Messiah through the grace of God. Stop and think on this a moment, dear reader. As we consider this letter of Paul to the Romans, do we grasp that his mission is that of evangelizing *Israelites* with the gospel of Christ? Granted, Paul also referred to them as Gentiles due to their former lost condition, but verse 5 unmistakably identifies this *elect* remnant of believers as saved *Israelites*.

Verse 7...

*“What then? **Israel** hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but **the election** hath obtained it, and **the rest** were blinded.”*

In this verse, *Israel* refers to the nation *as a whole*, not the Northern Kingdom only. Both the context of verse 7 and the context of this entire chapter (especially verses 1, 26, & 32) verify Paul’s burden for *all* Israel. In verses 12 and 25, he employs the word *fullness* to describe *all* Israel. In verse 7, Paul is simply stating that at the time he was writing, *only a few* among Israel had found that for which they were seeking, and *not all* Israel. (Compare John 1:11-13.)

What was Israel seeking except righteousness (Rom 9:30-33; 10:1-4)? Righteousness cannot be obtained by Moses, but only by Jesus Christ through the New Covenant which was promised to Judah and Israel (Jer 31:31; Hosea 1:11). Paul states here, however, that only a few among Israel had been *elected* so far to obtain Christ’s righteousness, *and the rest were blinded*. How could Paul say it more clearly? At the

time he was writing, some Israelites had believed the gospel while other Israelites had not. Mark the two camps within Israel: The *elect* and *the rest*. The elect were those Israelites who had become Christians, and the rest were yet in unbelief. **In Romans 11**, Paul's message is focused on bringing the gospel of Christ to Israelites, not non-Israelites.

Why was Paul so intent towards Israel's salvation? Did he and/or God not care about saving non-Israelites also? Of course they cared. God's plan, however, had always focused primarily on redeeming Israel *first* so that they could finally accomplish what He had called them to do, namely to be His instrument to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3; Isaiah 43:1, 10-16; Jer 51:19-20) through Christ. Paul did not expect God to be saving non-Israelite Gentiles first so that they would provoke the Jews to jealousy. On the contrary, he was concentrating upon God's promise through all of His prophets to redeem Israel *first* so that they would provoke the remainder of humanity towards the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Verses 8-10...

“(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.”

To whom were these verses referring? They were describing *Israelites* before Paul's time who had not believed God. Paul repeated these earlier words of David (Ps 69:22) and Isaiah (Isa 29:10) to describe the same situation of

unbelief that still remained during his day among *Israel* under the New Covenant dispensation. In essence, the people mentioned in verses 8-10 are the *many that were called*, but **not** *the few that were chosen* [i.e. **elected**] among Israel (Mat 22:14). They were those Israelites that were *blinded* (v. 7), and who were still clinging to the Old Covenant based on their own works of righteousness rather than on the New Covenant's grace through Christ.

Verse 11...

*“I say then, Have **they** stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.”*

Who is “*they*” referring to in this verse? (Notice that the opening question and answer in this verse is very similar to the opening question and answer in verse 1.) The word *they* is referring to that portion of *Israel* labeled ***the rest*** in verse 7, namely those who were still clinging to the Old Covenant and trying to achieve their own righteousness. That is, they were those who had not yet recognized and received their Messiah's righteousness that was already accomplished for them.

A proper identification of *they* in verse 11 is paramount for a clear and proper understanding of verses 11-12. Who was it that ***stumbled*** except Israel (*a portion* of both Judah and Israel, Isaiah 8:14-18)? Who was it that ***fell*** except the *many* in Israel and Judah that refused the righteousness of Christ? Paul was concerned about those that were still *fallen*. The word *fall* is a very key word in this verse. Israel's Messiah was “*set for the **fall** and rising again of many in Israel...*” (Luke 2:34; Acts 15:16).

Read the last part of verse 11 again: “***...but rather through their*** [i.e. Israelites under the Old Covenant] ***fall, salvation***

is come unto the gentiles” (i.e. all gentile nations, not just gentilized Israelites). Why would Paul make such a statement? He did so because the entire world was to be saved through God’s instrument, Israel (Gen 12:3). This was not to occur, however, until Israel was redeemed (Isa 59:20-21; Rom 11:26) and indwelt with their Messiah (Gal 3:29). Furthermore, Israel could not be redeemed until they *fell* and thus needed redemption which could be provided only through Jesus Christ. In essence, the world (all nations... all gentiles) could only be blessed by means of Israel’s *fall* since Israel could never achieve God’s purpose for them under the Old Covenant.

To state it another way, **Jesus Christ is both the *savior* of the world, and the *redeemer*** (redemption is a unique type of salvation for those who formerly had a marriage relationship with God) **of Israel**. Before the world could be saved, the Messiah needed to redeem Israel since it was through them that He would administer the blessings of Christ to the world (Gen 12:3; Isa 2:2; Jer 31:7). Once Israel is redeemed, salvation will become more available to all the nations through Israel, in whom the Messiah will be dwelling (Col 1:27).

The above explanation may seem strange, if not somehow twisted, because God’s plan of salvation has been *turned upside down* today so that the truth now appears to be a strange thing (Hosea 8:12; Isa 29:16; Acts 17:6). His plan of salvation begins with the unconditional promise that He made to Abram in Genesis 12:3 when He declared that, through Abram’s offspring (particularly Jesus Christ, BUT also His brethren whom He came to *redeem*), all the world would be blessed. Later in Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9, God confirms again that Israel (or Joseph/Ephraim who inherited Israel’s birthright, 1 Chron 5:2) is to be His “firstborn” SON (i.e. nation-wise).

Yet today, because of gross darkness (Isa 60:2), a majority of Christians believe that since Israel sinned so badly, God has set them aside for the time being, while His salvation is shifted to non-Israelite gentiles. Then later, after some gentiles are saved, the Messiah will return a 2nd time and will finally redeem Israel, which is **exactly backwards** from God's plan of salvation. May God grant us mercy to rightly divide His Word.

Where did Christians ever come up with such an idea? Much of the confusion can be attributed to tradition's poor and faulty exposition of Romans 9 - 11, and especially Romans 11:11-12. Let us read verse 11 again:

*“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should **fall** [i.e. fail]? God forbid: but rather through their **fall** [i.e. trespass], salvation is come unto the Gentiles...”*

In the KJV, the second use of the word *fall* in verse 11 is entirely different from its first occurrence, and the difference is critical to recognize. The first time it means **to fail**, while the second time it means **trespass**. One might paraphrase it as follows:

*“Has Israel stumbled so that they should become a **failure** for God's plan to bless the world through them? God forbid; but rather through their **sin**, salvation will become available to the entire world...”*

Notice the final part of verse 11 again:

*“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should **fall** [fail]? God forbid: but rather through their **fall***

[trespass] *salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke* [arouse] *them to jealousy* [zealousness].”

In Romans 11, **two different groups** of people *provoke* someone else *to jealousy*. It is critical that we rightly divide these two groups carefully. In one case, Israel provokes non-Israelite nations towards the gospel. In another case, an *election* within Israel provokes the *rest* (remaining unbelievers) of Israel towards the gospel.

The first group of people is mentioned here in verse 11. As we've just previously discovered, this group denotes Israelites that are provoking non-Israelite nations towards Christ. By its context, we can conclude that Israel's *fall* (trespass) necessitated their Messiah to redeem them which, in effect, would eventually provoke (arouse & inspire) the non-Israelite nations towards Israel's blessed redemption. This provocation towards a godly zealosity is prophesied in **Isaiah 2:1-5**; Zechariah 14:16-19; and less conspicuously in Genesis 12:3. God's plan for His People Israel was that they would be His *firstborn* son (nation-wise), providing a good witness to God's other children (nations) so that they would follow in the steps of His firstborn son. This could never be accomplished under the Old Covenant. God's firstborn son (Israel) had to be *born again* (1 Peter 1:1-3) before he could provide a good example that would provoke (stir up & inspire) God's other children to desire the same new birth that resulted in such blessings to him.

The other group (*the elect* of Israel) that provokes someone else (*the rest* of Israel) to jealousy is mentioned in verse 14, and will be addressed later when we arrive there in this study.

Verse 12...

“Now if the fall [trespass] of them [all Israel] be the riches of the world, and the diminishing [failure] of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness [full inclusion, ESV]?”

The first part of this verse is obviously a summary of verse 11 followed by a stimulating question. Let us paraphrase it: *Now if Israel’s failure [through their own works] to achieve God’s purpose for them has resulted in opening up a door of salvation for the entire world, how much more and greater salvation will be the result when all Israel recognizes and accepts their Messiah (Rom 11:26)?*

Take ample time to carefully meditate upon verses 11-12. They are possibly the two most difficult and critical verses to grasp in chapter 11 of Romans. A proper understanding of them provides the key to appreciating the burden on Paul’s heart in this chapter.

Has Israel’s failure to achieve God’s purpose for them resulted in opening up a door of salvation for *the world*? Verse 11 states emphatically that it has. **To what degree**, however, has the world’s salvation occurred? Even in our day, it still appears to be a minority of the world. Therefore Paul clarified in verse 12 that the world’s salvation is limited to the degree of all Israel’s complete redemption. At the time of Paul’s writing, the majority of Israel was yet in unbelief, but when all (*the fulness*) of Israel finally recognizes and embraces the redemption provided for them in their Messiah, **“how much more”** will be the world’s salvation?

Verse 13...

“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office.”

“For I speak unto you gentiles...” This verse begs another vital clarification of the word *gentiles!* Because of the traditions of men, many people have been misled regarding the entire significance of this word. Strong’s Concordance provides the following definition for the KJV word gentiles: “*gentiles, nations, heathens, or people.*” Most Bible students and scholars agree that *gentiles* refers to those who are “not His People.” A confusion arises, however, since *His People* (Israel) became not His People after God cast them away due to their unfaithfulness to Him. This is plainly cited in **Hosea 1:1-9-10-11** and **2:23**. Most importantly, in **Romans 9:24-27** Paul refers back to this passage in Hosea and, in doing so, he describes those **Israelites** who were not His People any longer as... **Gentiles**. Selah!

Again in Ephesians 2:3, Paul refers to Israelites as being just like “others” (implying other *gentiles...* i.e. other non-Israelite gentiles). How do we know that Paul was speaking to Israelites in Ephesians 2? It is apparent from the context of Ephesians 2:1-3 where Paul describes the Ephesians as those “*who were dead in trespasses and sins.*” According to 1 John 3:4 and Psalm 147:19-20, “*those who were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephes 2:1-3) applies to Israelites who had been given God’s Law. Also compare the word *adoption* in Ephesians 1:5 with *adoption* in Romans 9:4-5. If the *adoption* pertained to Israel as Romans 9:4 asserts, then the Ephesians whom Paul was addressing in Ephesians 2 were Israelites.

Peter also mentions those who *in time past* (Ephes 2:2) were *not His People* (1 Pet 2:6-9-10). Notice the two groups again (believers & unbelievers **in Zion** where God’s Law is, 1 Pet 2:6; Isa 2:3). With these multiple witnesses that correlate Israelites with gentiles, it should be evident that anyone (including racial Israelites!) who is *not His People*, is a gentile.

Why elaborate on *gentiles* in this already difficult 11th chapter of Romans? We do so because it is crucial to one's understanding of Romans 11. Consider verses 1 and 11 again, and notice that Israel was cast off and rejected by God for their unfaithfulness. Paul's concern is whether *all* of them would be cast off forever. His answer is an emphatic "no." Then he precedes to explain why.

Observe how Paul describes these gentiles in verse 13 as "you" *gentiles* in contrast to "the" *gentiles* [and "the world"] in verses 11-12. Although one may think that making such a distinction is unwarranted, we will soon discover in verse 14 that "these" gentiles are none other than **Paul's racial kinsmen**, namely **Israelites** to whom he was sent as an apostle (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Gal 2:7-9).

Verse 14...

*"If by any means I may provoke to emulation **them which are my flesh**, and might save some of them."*

In this verse, we will resume our discussion of the second group of people that were to be "*provoked to jealousy*." (*Emulation* is the same Greek word that is translated *jealousy* in verse 11.) Paul stated that he was speaking to "these" particular **gentiles** (verse 13) so that he could "*provoke to emulation **them which are my flesh**, and might save some of them.*" Romans 9:3-5 declares that Paul's racial kinsmen were Israelites. There simply cannot be any doubt that **these gentiles** who Paul is referring to in this verse are Israelites who had become gentilized (no longer "His People") due to their past unfaithfulness.

While this will seem shocking to some at first, it really shouldn't be when it is seen in view of Romans chapters 9 through 11, for these three chapters are dedicated to the salvation of *all* Israel (Rom 11:26-27). There are always two

groups of Israelites in view throughout these three chapters; those who believed in Christ, and those who did not. The reason that non-Israelite gentiles are even included in these three chapters is because they also are affected (Gen 12:3) by Israel's redemption.

Observe Romans 10:19 where Paul quoted **Moses** who prophesied about Israel's unbelievers ("children in whom is no faith") being "*provoked to jealousy by a foolish nation*" (Deut 32:20-21). Moses' prophecy is being fulfilled today by Christians. Both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles regard Christians as "foolish" (1 Cor 1:18-29; 4:10). Furthermore in 1 Peter 2:9-10 God describes Christians as a "nation." God's mission for this *foolish nation* (i.e. Christians) is to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8) to *provoke* (stir up & inspire) unbelieving Jews and Gentiles toward a *jealousy* (emulation) for God.

Who were the unbelievers that Moses said would be *provoked to jealousy* by a foolish nation? They were the unbelieving sector within *Israel*. They were the same kindred people in the New Scriptures that Paul often referred to as *gentiles*. In Romans 10:19 and 11:11, 14, Paul used the same terminology as Moses did to relate the same prophecy among the same people **during the Christian era**. The direct association of old Israel's unbelievers with *these* New Testament *gentiles* (Rom 11:13-14) is clear and unmistakable. In this comparison, they are one and the same. Without question, in contexts where racial Israelites are in unbelief, the Bible sometimes describes them as *gentiles*.

Verse 15...

*"For if the casting away of **them** be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of **them** be, but life from the dead?"*

Who is *them*? *Them* refers to Israel *as a whole*. The verse is about the casting away of the entire nation's covenant-heritage with God. Just as the name Israel in verse 7 assumes the entire ("full") nation of Israel, so *them* in this verse is similarly applied. This verse is simply a reiteration of verses 11-12. If you are still unsure of who *them* represents in this verse, consider reviewing the paragraphs under verses 11-12.

*"...what shall the receiving of **them** be, but life from the dead?"* (verse 15f)

Surely Paul had Ezekiel 37 in mind as he penned this phrase. There we read about the "Valley of Dry Bones" - *Israel's* dry, cast-away, fallen, dead bones. Ezekiel 37:9-12 assures us that Israel's bones that were dead and cast away from God would some day be raised again to life, "*the whole [full] house of Israel*" (v. 11). The entire chapter is dedicated to that subject. Notice in Ezekiel 37:28 that the heathens (non-Israelite gentiles) will see a glorious difference in Israel's *sanctified, holy, born-again* nature, thus implying that **they** (non-Israelite gentiles) will be "*provoked unto jealousy*" because of it.

Verse 16...

*"**For** if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy:
and if the root be holy, so are the branches."*

Let's be sure to keep all of this in context. As we proceed with verse 16, remember that Romans 9-11 is primarily about the salvation of Israel, not all nations (See outline on page 1). Also consider the conjunction "for" at the beginning of this verse, linking *those who were cast away* in verse 15 with *Israel*.

Who is “*the firstfruit*” of Israel? **Answer:** Jesus Christ
(1 Cor 15:23)

Who is “*the lump?*” **Answer:** Israel (Rom
9:21; Jer 18:1-6; 1 Cor 5:7)

Don't miss the significance of this wonderful illustration. The *lump* is related to a pattern in the Old Scriptures. In Jeremiah 18, the first lump (vessel) that was marred (“fallen...failed”) in the potter's hands depicted Israel under the Old Covenant. The second lump represented Israel under the New Covenant.

The sequel illustration in Romans 11:16 of **the root and the branches** is simply providing a double witness to the first example. In it, *the root* is Jesus Christ (Isa 11:10; 53:2; Rev 22:16) and *the branches* are Israelites (eventually ALL of them, Rom 11:26) that are born again in Jesus Christ (John 15:1-5; Gal 3:27-29).

Verse 16 is a bold and broad statement! In essence, it declares that if Jesus is holy, ALL Israel is (i.e. will be) holy. Why would Paul write this way? He did so because he believed that Jesus's perfect sacrifice at Calvary successfully redeemed all of those that He was commissioned by the Father to redeem.

Verse 17...

*“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in **among them**, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;” (KJV)*

*“But if some [“any”... Strong] of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted **in their place** to share the rich root of the olive tree,” (NRSV)*

Notice the major difference in translation between the KJV and the NRSV. While the majority of translations are similar to the KJV, I believe that the NRSV is correct and the others are very misleading, and cause terrible confusion.

Consider the context: What branches were broken off from Israel under the Old Covenant? First, Northern Israel was broken off (cut off, cast away) and became gentiles after they rebelled and were divorced from God (1 Ki 12:16-20, 28-33; 2 Ki 17:18, 23). Secondly, though Judah continued to oversee the Temple until the Messiah was sacrificed, their ministry was also cut off later when the Temple was destroyed. As Jesus foretold the Jews in Mat 21:44, “...*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you [Jews], and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*” Both houses of Israel were broken off in due time.

What was that nation who was to bring forth good fruit? It was a *born again* Israel nation. It was no longer a divided kingdom due to sin which was exposed under the Old Covenant, but a new, united kingdom with one King Jesus (i.e. *the rich root...* NRSV) under the New Covenant. Now observe verse 17 once again:

*“But if some [“any”... Strong] of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted **in their place** [by grace under the New Covenant] to share the rich root of the olive tree,” (NRSV)*

Recall the similar picture from Jeremiah 18:1-10:

*Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: **so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.** (Jer 18:3-4)*

Not only do we see a new Israel replacing an old Israel again in Jeremiah’s illustration of the potter, but we see that it is exactly what Paul had in mind in the preceding verse (v. 16).

Also related to this *wild* olive shoot are the *wild* grapes in Isaiah 5:1-7. (Both olives and grapes are symbols associated with Israel, Ps 128:3.)

Verse 18...

“Boast not against the [remaining natural] branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee” (KJV).

*“...do not brag that you are better than **those branches** [that have not yet received God’s grace]. But if you do brag - you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you” (HCSB).*

Verse 18 seems to be plain enough without any added explanation required. Verses 19-20 are an elaboration of verse 18 for extended clarification.

Verse 21...

*“For if God spared not the **natural** branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.”*

Meditate upon this verse carefully, paying particular attention to the significance of the word, natural. The *natural* (1 Cor 2:14-15) Israelite by race was weak and disobedient. A *supernatural* Israelite by grace was required (Gal 3:29) in order to fulfill the covenant God had promised to them (Jer 31:31).

NOTICE CAREFULLY: This verse is contrasting Israelites under the Old Covenant who were “spared not” (i.e. cut off and removed from Israel’s heritage with God) with Israelites under the New Covenant who have been redeemed by grace. That is, those Israelites who are now grafted “*in*” the good tree (i.e. “in Christ,” the *super-natural* tree) must beware that they too not become castaways (1 Cor 9:27; Heb 6:4-8; 10:26-31, 35, 39; 2 Pet 2:20-22; Luke 12:37 - 41 - 47-48) by becoming proud, lazy, and forgetting that they are saved by God’s grace alone. Hebrews 12:25 offers a striking, parallel verse:

*See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if **they** escaped not who refused him that spake on earth [Old Covenant], much more shall not **we** escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven [New Covenant]...*

Verse 24...

*“For if you were cut from what is **by nature** [1 Cor 2:14] a **wild** olive tree, and grafted, **contrary to nature** [supernaturally], into a **cultivated** [i.e. ‘good, domesticated, improved, better’ according to Strong’s Concordance] **olive tree** [i.e. Jesus, the good tree of life, Mat 19:17a], how much more will **these**, the natural branches [that are **still** cut off in unbelief], be grafted back into their own olive tree.” (ESV)*

Some Christians believe that this verse is comparing non-Israelite gentiles (*natural, wild* olive branches) with Israelite gentiles (*natural* olive branches). If that is the case, however, the verse has wandered from the context of the chapter which is distinguishing between Israel's *elect* (under the New Covenant of grace, vv. 5-7) and the *rest of Israel* that has not yet received God's grace. One needs to take a closer look at the inspired vocabulary that is employed in this passage.

Observe that **both groups** originated from the **natural olive tree!** The olive tree is a predominant symbol associated with *Israel* throughout the Bible (Gen 8:11; Ex 27:20; Lev 24:2; 1 Kings 6:23, 31-33; Ps 52:8; Isa 17:6; 24:13; Jer 11:16; Hosea 14:6; Zech 4:3, 11-14; Rev 11:4).

Notice the difference between the two different groups that are grafted into *the good* olive tree. One is described as *wild* while the other is described as *these* (i.e. these "*the other natural branches of the olive tree*" is implied).

How will *these* natural branches of the olive tree be ***much more*** grafted into the good olive tree? Do the words "much more" refer to much more successful, much more desire or motivation, much more in number, or much more something else? While it almost seems as if the latter group (i.e. *these*) will be *much more* inspired or zealous at being grafted into the good olive tree, my first guess is that the words *much more* are related to the size of population. The first group was a smaller *elected* group within Israel. The second group to be grafted in later would be *much more* in number percentage wise. Strong's Concordance explains that the word translated *more* (# 3123, "*mallon*") in this verse means "more in a greater degree." This phrase "*how much more*" is also exactly the same phrase that appears in verse 12 which again is comparing a greater degree in number, not a greater degree of zeal.

It is impossible that “*much more*” could refer to grafting success rate since ALL Israelites (both groups) were to be successfully grafted into the good olive tree.

However, if the words “*much more*” are meant to describe an amount of zeal or eagerness at being grafted into the good olive tree, perhaps such a view might be legitimate since this group consisted of those Israelites who clung so adamantly to Judah, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Old Covenant letter of the law. At Messiah’s 2nd Coming when God’s grace is poured upon them, their eyes will be opened to Him that they had rejected (John 1:11... He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.). At this awakening they will be especially grieved and therefore *much more* eager to be grafted into the Messiah. Notice the **great** (i.e. *much more*) **mourning** and repentance that is described in Zechariah’s prophecy concerning this great event at the Messiah’s 2nd Coming:

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a **great mourning in Jerusalem**, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.”* (Zech 12:10-11 NKJV)

In the end, what is most noteworthy in verse 24 is that ALL of Israel’s *natural* branches were to be grafted into the *good* olive tree and become *super-natural* branches.

Verse 25...

*“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of **this mystery**, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that **blindness in part** is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”*

If Romans 9 - 11 seems difficult to grasp, that’s because it is! In Romans 11:25, Paul describes the subject of Israel’s partial blindness as a *mystery*. The complete salvation of every Israelite is still a mystery to many today. According to 1 Corinthians 2:7-13 and 4:1 (+ Rom 16:25-26), however, Christians are able to understand such *deep things of God* as they seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in His Word.

Because of this mystery regarding Israel’s *partial blindness*, Paul cautioned those Israelites who had been grafted into the good olive tree (Christ, Col 1:27) not to exalt themselves over their other brethren that were not yet Christians since all true Christians stand by grace alone. (Christians should remember this whenever they are tempted to criticize others for their blindness to certain spiritual matters that have become evident to them but not to those whom they are criticizing [1 Cor 2:11-13].)

Paul then continues to explain that this blindness has occurred only to a portion of Israel (those in unbelief) “...**until the fulness** [i.e. completion] **of the Gentiles be come in** [i.e. enter its due season].”

What does “*until the fulness of the gentiles be come in*” mean? Are these Israelite gentiles or non-Israelite gentiles? By reading a few Bible commentaries, one will discover a number of various opinions regarding the meaning of this phrase. The following Scriptures, however, supercede any human commentary by interpreting Scripture with Scripture:

“And they [Israelites] shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24)

*“But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for **it has been given to the Gentiles.** And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”* (Rev 11:2 NKJV).

While the above verses are not the exact wording as that found in Romans 11:25f, they are very similar. By reading the other verses surrounding Luke 21:24, namely verses 20-28, one comes to understand that *the times of the Gentiles treading Israel under their feet* occurred in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus entered Jerusalem and tread down the Temple. Some Bible students, like myself, believe that there will be a second fulfillment of this prophecy prior to the return of Israel’s glorious King Jesus with His Body. At that time, Israel’s Kingdom will be *fully* restored (Acts 1:6), gaining ascendancy over the Gentiles. As we will soon discover in this study, this is precisely what the verse following Romans 11:25 describes.

In light of the above comparison of Romans 11:25 with Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:2-4, the meaning of the phrase “*until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in*” might be paraphrased as follows: “... *blindness in part is happened to Israel until **God’s mission for the Gentiles*** [any & all gentiles] ***has been accomplished*** (come to its completion - fullness).” When that “due season” arrives (comes in) and the Gentiles have completely *broken the power of the holy people*, and there is *no one left to help them* (Deut 32:36; **Isa 59:16- 20-21**; 63:5; Dan 12:7f), THEN Israel’s Redeemer will

return. Return for what? For the answer, read Romans 11:26, the next verse in this study.

Verse 26...

“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

WOW (Selah)! Paul finally blurts out what has been on his heart all along. “And so” is Paul’s way of saying “in conclusion.” What is it that he has been aiming at from the beginning? Notice a quick summary of Romans 11:

“...Hath God cast away [most of] His people?” (v. 1)

“...[All] Israel hath not obtained that [i.e. righteousness] which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” (v. 7)

“... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (v. 25)

*“**And so... all Israel... shall be... saved...**”* (v. 26)

When the Deliverer (Redeemer, Isa 59:20) comes to Zion, **what** will He turn away? He will turn away *ungodliness* which is the cause of *blindness*. What is it that helps one to see that which is true and pure except a new birth (John 3:3, 5)? **Who** are the blind ones that will finally see? *Jacob*. While others besides Jacob will also see, this context is referring strictly to Jacob. The name Jacob denotes all 12 tribes, not just the Jews (Judah) and not just the ten tribes. Mark the verse carefully:

“ALL Israel shall be saved [born again].” (v. 26)

“And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness” (Isaiah 29:18).

*Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but **my servant**? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant? (Isaiah 42:18-19)*

Verse 27...

*“For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away **their** sins.”*

*“For this is my covenant unto them, when I will take away their sins.” We should remember that the New Covenant was promised to *Israel* (Jer 31:31-) - to *all* of them - to the Northern Israelites who rebelled and separated themselves “far off” from God’s Sanctuary, and to Southern Judah who remained “near” the Sanctuary [Ps 114:2]. Also remember Peter’s second sermon after Pentecost (Acts 3:26) when he declared “*ye men of Israel... and... the children of the prophets* (Acts 3:12, 25)... *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*” (Acts 3:26).¹*

Verse 30...

*“For as ye [Israelites] in times past [under the Old Covenant] have [i.e. had] not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through **their** [disobedient Israelites in the N.C. era] *unbelief*.”*

It is important here to be careful in identifying the two groups that are contrasted in the next few verses. We have

emphasized from the beginning of this study that the two groups in Romans 11 are *the elect* of Israel that first received God's grace, and *the rest* of Israel that were blinded until a later period. We also have clarified that both of these groups included some from both the Jews (Judah) and the Gentiles (formerly Northern Israelites). In verses 30-32, Paul is comparing disobedient ones in Israel's *past* history under the Old Covenant with the disobedient ones in Israel's *present* day under the New Covenant.

Verse 31...

*“Even so have **these** [disobedient Israelites in the New Covenant era] also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.”*

Paul's overall concern in Romans 11 is regarding *the elect* among Israel and *the rest* among Israel. There has always been a certain portion of believers and unbelievers throughout Israel's history, whether in the past under the Old Covenant or at the present time of Paul's writing (New Covenant). Recall again Paul's example of Elijah in the opening verses of this chapter:

*“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life? But what does the divine response say to him? I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. **Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**” (Romans 11:2-5 NKJV).*

Finally Paul sums up chapter 11 by declaring that just as ALL Israel has been in unbelief at one time or another, even so ALL Israel shall be saved eventually.

Verse 32...

*“For God hath concluded **them all** in unbelief,
that he might have mercy **upon all**.”*

Who is *them all*? According to the context, is it...

- all people, in general (i.e. Israelite gentiles and non-Israelite gentiles)?
- all *wild* Israelites?
- all Israelites (i.e. both *wild* and the *others...* of both Judah & Israel)?

If one cannot answer this final question confidently, I recommend that he re-read this entire study of Romans 11. Until one understands that chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans are concerning the final outcome of God’s New Covenant salvation to Israel, many verses will remain doubtful, if not a mystery. Remember that Paul’s desire as he wrote this letter was that Christians would not remain confused or ignorant regarding **Israel’s** “*partial*” blindness. When Israel’s blindness is completely healed, they will finally be ready to accomplish the mission that God outlined for them in Genesis 12:3, namely to be His instrument of blessing to all the families of the earth through Jesus Christ.

¹ While our interpretation of certain verses such as 27 and 32 may *seem* to contradict God’s love for the entire world, thus portraying Him as being prejudiced towards His People Israel, it should be remembered that this chapter targets the nation Israel almost exclusively. One should keep in mind that the salvation of the entire world is dependent upon the redemption of Israel. The burden of the prophets centered upon Israel’s Messiah coming **to redeem them first** so that they could fulfill God’s destiny of them being

a blessing to all other nations (Gen 12:3) through the Messiah that was to indwell them.

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