

A Bible Study on Romans 11:11-36

How God will deal with Israel in the future

Introduction

What then is this section teaching?

Having explained fully the meaning of the Gospel from chapters 1-8, Paul is now left with a potential question raised by his Jewish readers. It is a question in relation to the future of the Jewish nation in view of the OT promises of God. The issue is this, *“Has God finished with the Jewish nation as a whole; has He written off the Jews as a hopeless case given that they were responsible for rejecting their Messiah? Now that many more Gentiles are being converted and brought into the Church, it seems as if God has washed His hands of Israel”*.

This is raised by Paul in chapter 11 verse 1, *“I ask, then, has God rejected His people”*. He then gives an emphatic answer, *“By no means”*. This then is the gist of the argument that gave rise to the eleventh chapter of Romans. Paul becomes a prophet and explains – for the sake of the Gentiles and the Jews in the church at Rome – that God has not give up with the Jewish nation as a whole; that there is a special future awaiting them.

Important to our study is that Paul here is not speaking about individuals. He is not speaking about separate Jews or individual Gentiles. Rather, he is speaking of the bulk of nations; ethnic groups.

So, basically he is saying that previously, in the OT, the Jews were in the Kingdom of God and the Gentiles outside; but in the present time the Gentiles are in the Kingdom whilst the bulk of the Jews are outside; yet there is a time coming when the Jews as a whole will be introduced back into the Kingdom of God. The emphasis in the past was Israel – just a few Gentiles included. Now it is reversed with the emphasis on the Gentiles – just a few Jews converted. But, in the future the Jews as a whole will become the focus of God’s attention; the nation as a whole will come in fullness to believe the Gospel.

Now this was prophesied in the OT:

God turns to the Gentiles. Isaiah 49:6 *"He says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

God makes future promises to Israel: Jer 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope"*

This was taught by Jesus:

Rejection of Israel and turning to the Gentiles: Matt 21:43 *"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits".*

Matt 8:11-12 *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

My aim here is to approach this material in three stages:

- a) Give a simplified over-view of this passage
- b) Give a verse by verse explanation of the passage
- c) Give four concluding applications

1. A brief over-view of Romans 11:11-32

1:1 In order to approach this difficult passage as simply as possible I have chosen to present two over-views of the passage, the second deeper than the first. I hope that this will enable us to gain a global view of the passage so that we do not get troubled with too much detail with which to begin. We will then penetrate the passage at a deeper level.

1:2 Divisions in Romans 11:11-32

1. Verses 11-12: Main theme simply stated;
 - a. Showing the present salvation of Jews & Gentiles (11)
 - b. Showing the future salvation of Israel (12)

2. Verses 13-22: Gentiles to have right understanding of the Jews
 - a. Pastoral section: Paul an apostle to the Gentiles (13-14)
 - b. Future salvation of Israel repeated (as in vs 12) (15)
 - c. Relations between Gentiles & Jews in the Church (16-17)
 - d. Warning to the Gentiles (18-21)
 - e. Summary of this section (22)

3. Verses 23-24: Possibility; reasonableness of the restoration of the Jews

4. Verses 25-32: The certainty of the future restoration of the Jews

2. A brief exposition of Romans 11:11-32

Present salvation of Gentiles and Jews 11

Verse 11 *“So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous”.*

“*They*” must refer to the Jews because this has been Paul’s main focus since the beginning of the chapter.

“*Stumble*”...“*fall*”. It would appear that the Jewish nation has not completely “*fallen*”. Rather, it has “*stumbled*”. The implication seems to be that there is room for the nation to stabilise itself again in the sight of God. A stumble is not so serious as a fall.

“*through their trespass...*” The AV and NKJV are incorrect in their translations here. The Greek has παραπτώματι which means “*trespass*” (ESV, NIV). Paul has already said that Israel “*stumbled*” but did not “*fall*”. There is a difference.

What “*trespass*” is Paul referring to? If the “*stumble*” was Israel’s misunderstanding of the Messiah Jesus, the “*trespass*” would probably be the nation’s rejection of Jesus. This implies that any rejection of Jesus becomes a “*trespass*”, a sin.

“*salvation has come to the Gentiles*”. The emphasis throughout the NT is the Spirit’s focus upon the Gentiles. Although there were many Jews being saved, it was really the Gentiles who were filling the Churches. Paul saw himself as an apostle to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, as a group, have become the centre of divine attention; not the Jews although some Jews are being saved.

“*so as to make Israel jealous*”. God has not rejected His people. Jews were and are still being saved. The salvation of the Gentiles must have proved to be an anomaly to the Jews. Perhaps it angered them; provoked them; frustrated them to see Gentiles turning from idols and beginning to worship the one and only God. It is God’s design to make the Jews envious of the Gentiles; to say, “*Why are we not getting this blessing?*” The aim is to induce the Jews to come into the kingdom through making them jealous.

Verse 12 “*Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*”

The future salvation of the Jews is plainly stated 12

Paul now uses another word to describe Israel’s “*trespass*” through rejection of Jesus. ἥττημαῖηττημα, meaning “*defeat, failure*”. This is not a complete fall but it is a failure on the part of the Jews.

(Note how the ASV, KJV, NKV translate παράπτωμα as “*fall*”. This is an incorrect translation as it makes the previous verse meaningless and contradictory.)

Twice Paul uses πλοῦτος “*riches*” in relation to the Gentiles. Salvation must be viewed as “*riches*”. In 2 Cor 4:7 Paul refers to the Gospel message of salvation as a “*treasure*”.

Πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν. “*...their full inclusion*”. Πλήρωμα means “*fullness, completion, that which fills up the gap*”. The best commentary on this word is found in

Mark 2:21 where the un-shrunk cloth, patch, fills up the hole in the garment. Paul's thought here seems to be the salvation of the Jews in large numbers would be that which fills up, or completes the kingdom of God. It will be completed when the Jews are converted in large numbers.

But, Paul makes an additional point here, not the Jews, but the Gentiles. What he is saying is, "*What will be the effect on the Gentiles when large numbers of Jews are saved?*" When the Jews as a nation are radically changed through the Gospel it will have a great effect upon the Gentiles. Large number of Jews converted resulting in large numbers of Gentiles being converted.

Verse 13 "*Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry*"

Pastoral section: Paul an apostle to the Gentiles 13-14

Although there are many references here to the Jews, it is the Gentiles that Paul now turns his attention. Indeed, he calls himself "*an apostle to the Gentiles*". Paul diverts from his main subject about the Jews to deal with a pastoral matter relating to the Gentiles. He does not pick up his main theme about the future of the Jews again until vs 15, and then returns to the Gentiles from vs 16-24.

Τὴν διακονίαν μου δοξάζω "*I glory in my ministry*". The word δοξάζω can mean, "*honour, praise, glorify, magnify*". Paul rejoiced in his ministry; he did not underestimate the nature of his ministry. On the contrary, he felt proud of the ministry God had given him to the Gentiles; he honoured, glorified it. Note that it is not himself that he is glorifying, rather it is the ministry itself.

Verse 14 "*in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them*".

Compare this with verse 11, "*Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous*". Paul longed to see his fellow countrymen brought to faith in Christ. He would use any means possible. For him, a ministry to the Gentiles would have the desired effect.

What would any self respecting Jew think when they hear and see an ex-Pharisee turned Christian actually spending his time among the Gentiles? Confusion, frustration and jealousy; jealous of the Gentiles who are getting all the attention; jealous of them because they give the appearance of spirituality, something that many religious Jews did not have?

Verse 15 “*For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?*”

Future salvation of the Jews re-stated 15

Again, thinking primarily of the Gentiles, Paul returns to his former subject of the grand future conversion of the Jews.

“...*their rejection*”. At the present moment Israel as a nation has been “*rejected*”. Paul uses a strong word ἀποβολή (from ἀποβάλλω) which can mean “*loss*” as well as “*rejection*”. This is how it is in Paul’s day and our day. The nation as a whole is no longer the single focus of God. There has been a “*rejection*”.

“*The reconciliation of the world*”. In NT times the planet was divided into two groups – the Jews and the world. Those in the world constituted the Gentiles, Samaritans and all other ethnic non-Jewish groups. It was as simple as that.

So, the “*reconciliation of the world*” is Paul’s way of describing the present day conversion of non-Jewish groups, namely the Gentiles.

But, “*what will their acceptance mean?*” πρόσλημψις (from προσλαμβάνω) meaning, “*acceptance*”. As stated in verse 1, God has not entirely rejected this nation. As the foregoing verses suggest, there will be significant blessings poured out on this people. They, as a nation, will be accepted back into the favour of God.

But, as an Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul has his eye on the effect that this would have on the Gentiles. It will result in “*life from the dead*”. Revival on a grand scale is predicted for the Gentiles.

Verse 16 *“If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches”.*

Relations between Gentile Christians and the Jewish nation 16-17

φύραμα noun nominative neuter singular, meaning, *“that which is mixed or kneaded, (a lump or batch of) dough”.*

At this point Paul wishes to explain his doctrine by way of two illustrations. In verses 12 and 15 Paul has stated the fact of the future inclusion and salvation of the Jews in large numbers. It speaks of a revival among the Jews – a revival that will include the Gentiles. Something great is going to happen.

The use of *“firstfruits”* speaks of something that is the precursor of something greater to follow. In the OT the *“firstfruits”* of the harvest was a small portion gathered from the fields and offered to God as a token of the larger harvest itself.

“If the dough offered as firstfruits....” In this case Paul is referring to *“dough”*. The reference is to Numbers 15:18-21 (LXX ἀπαρχὴν φυράματος; Rom 11:16 ἀπαρχὴ ἁγία, καὶ τὸ φύραμα).

“If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy”. *“Holy”* does not have to refer to sanctification. Rather it means here *“dedicated; set apart”* to God. That is the significance of offering the *“firstfruits”* to God as specified in Numbers.

“firstfruits”. So, what are the *“firstfruits”*? Could this refer to the *“elec”* that were being saved in the OT and during Paul’s day and ours. In other words, the people of God; the redeemed. I am in agreement with J. Murray & M. Lloyd-Jones who consider this to refer to the Patriarchs - Abraham; Isaac and Jacob – as the *“firstfruits”* and the *“root”*, rather than the remnant who are being saved both in Paul’s day and ours. Note how Abraham is referred to as the *“our forefather”* (Rom 4).

By saying the *“firstfruits”* are *“holy”*, in reference to the Patriarchs – the beginning of the Jewish nation. The implication is that as the *“firstfruits”* become a token of much more to come, so one day there will be a larger harvest of souls within Israel.

The second illustration suggests the same principle. The “*root*” represents the Patriarchs, i.e. the foundation of the Israelite nation. The “*branches*” then indicates the larger numbers of the Jews who will yet be saved.

So, putting both illustrations together, the teaching is that as God has established the foundation of Israel as a dedicated people set apart in the OT, so there will be a future for the nation. God has started – so He will continue and finish.

Verse 17 “*But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,*

“*But if some of the branches were broken off*”. But from what were the branches broken off? Who are the branches?

We have to work out first what is meant by the two olive trees spoken of in this verse.

“*a wild olive tree.....the olive tree*”, The first represents the Gentiles as a nation, or as an ethnic group. Not all of the Gentiles, but a large group. The second represents Israel from which certain branches were “*broken off*”.

Now, when we speak of Israel as “*the olive tree*” as being the Jewish nation we must recognise that within the nation were two groups. First, there was the natural, or physical Israel; people who were not spiritual, just part of the nation. Secondly, there were the spiritual ones, the redeemed people of God.

From this good olive tree – representing the people of God (although in two groups; the natural and the spiritual) “*some of the branches were broken off*”. That is, the natural Israel was no longer the focus of God’s attention.

Into this good olive tree “*a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others*”. That is, the Gentiles as an ethnic group, have been introduced and brought into the Kingdom of God.

This does not mean that the Gentiles have now become Jews. It does mean, however, that Gentiles have now become part of the family of God whose foundation

are the Patriarchs. This is what Galatians 3:9 says, “*So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*”.

Hence, “*...and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree*”.

Verse 18 “*do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you*”.

Warning to the Gentiles 18-20

It seems as if Paul breaks into his train of thought here because he goes off on a tangent only to return to his theme about the Jews in verse 23 where he says, “*...God has power to graft them back in again*”.

Why does Paul depart from his argument? He does so in order to challenge his Gentile readers who, when they hear of the “*branches*” being broken off, might think they have cause to be proud, having deserved God’s attention and goodness.

But, there is no room for pride or false confidence. The Gentiles have been “*grafted*” into the main olive tree, this is true, but they are to realise they have nothing of which to boast or be “*arrogant*”.

Indeed, all is still of grace; the reason the Gentiles remain attached to the tree is because they are being “*supported*” by the root.

Verse 19 “*Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”*”

Paul needs to stay with this issue. He presupposes an objection – couched in arrogance! Here the speaker is boasting, giving the impression that the Gentiles are better than the Jews. It seems to be a natural consequence.

The danger is that the Gentiles could do to the Jews what the Jews used to do to the Gentiles. It was typical of the Jews in NT times to despise the Gentiles and call them “*dogs*”. Now that the Gentiles are in and the Jews are out, there is a potential for the same thing to happen, but this time the Gentiles might ridicule the Jews. The Gentiles might be led to think that they are superior to the Jews and this is why God is now giving them His attention. A warning against anti-Semitism

Verse 20 *“That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear”.*

The use of the term “*unbelief*” shows that the necessity of faith in justification is and will be the only means through which a person – Gentile or Jew- is justified.

Paul’s reply is to partly agree with this statement. Yes, the Jews as a nation have been “*broken off*” because of their “*unbelief*”. This was their failing. But, and here comes the challenge, the Gentiles will only “*stand fast*” in the tree as long as they continue in faith. Therefore, in place of arrogance, there must be “*fear*” because the implication here is that if they do not remain in faith they may also find themselves cut off.

“*fear*”. This is the antidote to pride and arrogance. Φοβοῦ (φοβέω) from which we have phobia. Complacency and superficiality must be guarded against. The bible encourages us to “*fear God*”; to “*work out our salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12).

Verse 21 *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you”.*

Here is another challenge for the Gentiles to think about. Israel was/is God’s chosen people, the “*natural branches*”, but they did not pursue God’s way of salvation by faith (Rom 9:32). So, given that the Gentiles constitute the grafted in shoot and not the “*natural branches*”, they must take care not to fall into unbelief. If Israel was not spared – neither will the Gentiles .

If God was able to cut off the natural branches – God’s own favoured people – it is quite easy for Him to cut off the unnatural branches – the Gentiles. If He has been able to do the greater – sever His own people, He can do the lesser – sever those who were not formerly His own people.

Does this mean that a Christian can lose his or her salvation? No, not at all. It must be remembered that Paul is not speaking about individuals. Rather he is thinking of groups of people – ethnic groups.

On the one hand there are the Jews and on the other the Gentiles. Although some Jews are being saved through the election of grace, largely the nation, as a branch, has been cut off from the main stem.

The Gentiles, as an ethnic group, have been grafted in. But, just as the Jews, as an ethnic group, were cut off through unbelief (yet some are saved), so God is capable of doing the same to the Gentiles as an ethnic group if there is a failure of faith (whilst some continue to be saved).

Verse 22 *“Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off”.*

Paul’s Summary 22

“*Note*”, ἴδε *“behold, look, take notice”*. It is important that we have a balanced view of God and that we do not allow the love of God to eclipse the other side of God, namely His *“severity”*. It is important to take careful notice of this, to remember this and take it into consideration.

Observe how Paul interjects some theology at this point. He leaves his main themes and calls attention to the doctrine of God. If his readers are to understand what he is saying they need to know something of the character of God.

They need to know that there are two sides to God. He may be a God of love; but He is also *“light”*. He can display kindness, but He can also display wrath.

“provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off”. This is a repetition of the previous statement in verse 21. Paul is still dealing with nations – not individuals. So this is not teaching that a Christian can fall from grace and lose salvation.

It is a warning to the Gentiles that they tread carefully and do not become arrogant.

Verse 23 “*And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again*”.

The possibility; reasonableness of the restoration of the Jews

Paul has now completed his digression in verses 18-22 where he addressed the Gentiles with their potential to arrogance. He now returns to his original subject, namely the future salvation of the Jews in the purposes of God.

Κάκεῖνοι δέ, ἐὰν μὴ ἐπιμένωσιν τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ, ἐγκεντρισθήσονται There is a future for the Jews as an ethnic group, because if they turn to Christ, God can graft them back into the main stem. It all hinges on their attitude towards Christ and their willingness to accept Him through faith. Their “*unbelief*” must be changed into belief.

Note again the importance of faith; although there is to be a significant restoration of the Jews, it will still be justification through faith. God’s way of salvation in the future will be the same as in the OT and the current time. The condition upon which the Jews can be grafted back into the olive tree is faith. This was his theme in chapter 10 of Romans.

There is only one principle which God ever uses in His dealings with men and women, namely faith. He has never and will never use any other method.

Δυνατὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν ἐγκεντρίσαι αὐτούς. This does not necessarily say that God will graft them in again, but that He has the power to do so if He wishes. God is able to do this. Δυνατὸς “*to be able; to have the power*”.

Do you believe that God could do this? If not, then you are doubting the very power of God. Furthermore, we must realise that one time it was thought that the Gentiles could never be brought into the Kingdom of God, but the power of God proved that He could. If through His power God has done it once – i.e. the Gentiles – then His power can do it again – i.e. the Jews.

Verse 24 *“For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree”*

The Gentiles who, as an ethnic group, have been cut off from a “*wild olive tree*” and grafted into a “*cultivated olive tree*”. In other words, as an ethnic group God has shown grace to the Gentiles so as to take them from the “*wild olive tree*” and place them into His own olive tree; i.e., from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, His kingdom.

Consequently, the same God can/is able/will (πόσω μᾶλλον....ἐγκεντρισθήσονται) be grafted back in to the olive tree (i.e., the Kingdom of God) where they, as an ethnic group, once belonged.

Verse 25 *“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”.*

The certainty of the future restoration of the Jews 25-32

It is important that when viewing the Middle East in NT times to recognise the existence of racism. There was always a strong divide between Jews and Gentiles. Each hated and despised the other. As a result, in the NT, much emphasis is placed on the importance of unity. As Paul considers himself an apostle to the Gentiles and, given that the Gentiles as an ethnic group are now the main focus of attention, there is a danger that the Gentiles will look down upon and despise the Jews.

This is why Paul had to make the digression in verses 18-22 to warn the Gentiles. So, once again Paul has to offer another stern warning.

Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν. *“I do not want you to be ignorant”.* There is something very important for these proud and arrogant Gentiles to learn.

ἵνα μὴ ᾔτε [παρὸ] *“so that you do not become wise among yourselves...”* ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι i.e., *“clever and wise in yourselves”*. The Greek word φρόνιμοι; (φρόνιμος) is associated with pride. They must not think that they were grafted into the olive tree because of their superiority and the Jews are out because of their inferiority.

“understand this mystery”. The use of the Greek term μυστήριον (mystery) has been used in the writings of Paul to refer to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the scope of salvation (see Ephesians 3:1-6). Now, in Romans 11 Paul seems to be using the same term to apply to God’s purposes in relation to the Jews and their future inclusion in salvation.

Once the Jews (as an ethnic group) were in and the Gentiles (as an ethnic group) were out; now the Gentiles are in and the Jews (as an ethnic group) are out. But God has future plans for the Jews as an ethnic group. This is the revealed mystery.

Πώρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν. It means that this spiritual hardening is only time limited. The “hardening” is temporary. The hardening is time limited until God acts again in respect of the Jewish nation.

Πώρωσις “hardening”. Greek word from which we get porosis of the liver or arteries.

“a partial hardening has come...” (Greek γέγονεν verb indicative perfect active 3rd person singular from γίνομαι). The hardening has happened to Israel. It has been a judicial hardening laid upon them by God (Rom 9:17).

ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθη. If this hardening is temporal and not permanent, the implication here is that the hardening will eventually end one day. This will be when the complete number of the elect Gentiles has been saved. Not all the Gentiles, but a great number (see vs 12).

Verse 26 “And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;

καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται. (Greek οὕτως meaning, “thus, in this way, like this”; compare John 3:16 use of οὕτως). Here, for the first time, Paul has made a significant unequivocal statement about the future salvation of the Jews as a nation. He does not mean to say that the entire nation will be saved, but that such a large proportion from Israel will be trusting in Christ so that, like the Gentiles in our day, it will be possible to say that the Jews are being saved in significant numbers, and that the nation has turned to Christ.

“will be saved” – this is a future event; not taking place in Paul’s day or ours, even though some Jews are being saved.

Καθὼς γέγραπται· ἦξει ἐκ Σιών ὁ ρυόμενος, This comprises a variety of OT quotes which Paul seems to join together: Isaiah 59:20-21, 27:9, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 14:7. His aim is not just to quote texts but to extract the teachings that come from these texts. It is also probable that Paul is quoting from the LXX version.

“The Deliverer will come from Zion...” i.e., may be from Israel –*“Zion”* which is Jerusalem - itself will arise God’s Redeemer, or act of redemption.

The Deliverer (Greek ὁ ρυόμενος verb participle present middle nominative masculine singular from ρύομαι). Notice how Paul speaks of one who will *“rescue”* God’s people. This is a common word in the NT when speaking of salvation or deliverance (see Matt 6:13, Luke 1:74, Col 1:13). This is salvation – a project to rescue those who are in danger; this is why it is called *“salvation”*.

ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ. Another way of speaking of salvation is to say, *“turn away ungodliness”*. Even though Judaism claims to worship Yahweh, the nation as a whole is described as being *“ungodly”*. Unless God is worshipped as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is not worshipped at all. Those who are outside of Christ, however religious, are still termed *“ungodly”*.

Verse 27 *“and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”*

Israel is used to God making Covenants. Is this why Paul introduces this concept? Is he saying that God’s Covenant with Israel still stands. The use of this term signifies God’s faithful promise to forgive their sins; that He has not utterly and entirely cast them off; they are still His Covenant people.

Forgiveness is expressed in strong terms, not untypical of OT terminology (Is 1:18, 43:25, 44:22, but Paul is quoting from Isaiah 27:9 using the opening words of the LXX) ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν showing a complete removal of sins.

Verse 28 “As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers”.

Pressing on with his argument in favour of a future salvation of a large number of Jews, Paul wants to show his readers that Israel, because of her history, is still very special to God.

Κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἐχθροὶ δι’ ὑμᾶς. (“on the one hand....on the other hand”
Greek μὲν..... δὲ)

The Jews as an ethnic group in the present time are enemies of the Gospel; they refuse to accept Christ as the Messiah. Indeed, in view of the Gentiles now having become the focus of divine attention, the Jews are seen – in Paul’s day and ours – as antagonistic towards God. God has turned away from the Jews as an ethnic group and now favours the Gentiles. The term ἐχθροὶ refers to the alienation from God’s favour and blessing.

“on you’re account”, (Greek “because of you”; δι’ ὑμᾶς) All this is for the sake of the Gentiles.

Yet, whilst this may be true in the current time, they are not entirely outside of God’s interests or His concern because He has future plans for them.

Κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογήν, ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας; God remembers the “*Fathers*”, i.e. Patriarchs of Israel, and the promises He has made to them. In this sense they remain “*beloved*”, Greek ἀγαπητοὶ.

Looked at from the standpoint of God’s eternal “*election*”, they are “*beloved*”. Furthermore, looked at from another standpoint, they are “*beloved for the sake of their forefathers*”, i.e., for the sake of the promises God made to the Patriarchs long ago. God has not cast of the people whom He foreknew. He still loves His own people.

Verse 29 “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”.

Here is an established principle in the Godhead to which Paul appeals. Having made promises to and through the “*Fathers*” in the OT, God does not go back on His word.

God is faithful in His promised giving of the “*gifts and the calling*” (Greek τὰ χαρίσματα and ἡ κλήσις).

“*the gifts*” (Greek χαρίσματα) must refer to Romans 9:4-5.

“*the calling*”; God’s call for them to be His own treasured possession and people.

There will be future blessings for Israel because God promised it through the OT and He never takes back His word. They are “*irrevocable*” – God does not change His mind or regret what He has promised or done.

Verse 30 “*For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience*”,

“*For just as you were at one time disobedient to God...*” The word “*disobedient*” (Greek ἠπειθήσατε verb indicative aorist active 2nd person plural from ἀπειθέω meaning “*disobedient; unbelieving*”) comes from the Greek word being “*unbelieving*”.

“*but now have received mercy*”. The word “*mercy*” in Greek is passive ἠλεήθητε (verb indicative aorist passive 2nd person plural from ἐλέεω). The significance of this is that the individual has been literally “*mercied*”. He or she has had mercy bestowed upon them. God has been active and they have been passive.

“*...because of their disobedience*” The Gentiles who can still remember their past “*disbelief*” but have now received the forgiveness of their sins through the mercy of God, should be able to empathise with the Jews who are now in the same position.

The implication is that if the Gentiles received mercy, why should not the Jews? Indeed, they only received this mercy because the Jews’ disbelief. Their stumbling has become the Gentiles salvation.

Verse 31 “*so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy*”.

Οὕτως καὶ , i.e., “*in the same way*” i.e., In the same way as the Gentiles were once disobedient but were shown mercy, so also the Jews who are now “*disobedient*” will be shown mercy.

The mercy of God in salvation does not stop with the Gentiles. It will be extended to the Jews also, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθῶσιν.

Verse 32 *“For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all”.*

Συνέκλεισεν verb indicative aorist active 3rd person singular from συγκλείω, meaning, “close up together, hem in, enclose”. See its use in Luke 5:6 where a large number of fish is enclosed in nets.

God has enclosed both ethnic groups – Jews and Gentiles – as one single group under disobedience. It does not matter whether a person is a Jew or Gentile; it makes no difference, all are under sin. Paul had referred to this in Rom 3:22-23 when he stated that there is no difference; all have sinned. It is the same as you read in Romans 3:10-18.

At one time the Gentiles – as a group – were shut up in disobedience. But God had mercy on them.

Now, at the present time God has shut up the Jews – as a group – in disobedience. But God will one day have mercy on them.

Being therefore enclosed under this one heading of “*disobedience*”, God is able to show mercy to both Gentiles and Jews alike in their salvation. Both groups have fallen into sin; both groups are dependent on the mercy of God.

Verse 33 *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”*

This chapter contains difficult teaching; it is complex and confusing. But, this is God; He is beyond our understanding.

“How unsearchable are his judgments”. The Greek uses a word (ἀνεξεραύνητα) meaning, “impossible to search out or fully understand, pertaining to being impossible to understand on the basis of careful examination or investigation”.

“...how inscrutable his ways” The Greek has a word (ἀνεξιχνίαστος) meaning, “too much to be measured, infinite, beyond one’s ability to imagine, that cannot be traced out, that cannot be comprehended”.

Indeed, God’s ways are totally beyond understanding; they are too vast for the human mind to grasp. Careful examination, whilst important for us to undertake, will never fully plumb the depths or comprehend His ways.

Verse 34 *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?”*

In order to emphasize the complexity of this teaching Paul points up to the very mind of God. His question is rhetorical in nature, τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου;. None of us can fathom the mind of God Himself. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55:8) in all of his doing, but more so in relation to the future of the Jewish nation.

“...who has been his counsellor?” Perhaps the Gentiles were complaining about this teaching given the animosity they once received from the Jews. If they had the chance they would like to instruct God rather than receive instructions from God. You cannot tell God what He should do.

So Paul puts it this way, τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο;. Who would dare take on the responsibility of attempting to counsel God and correct Him in His purposes? These words are reminiscent of Isaiah 40:14. Let us never challenge God in the face of His revelation; God is God and He alone can make decisions about the future of the Jews. Paul taught us this in chapter 9.

Verse 35 *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”*

(ἀνταποδοθήσεται verb indicative future passive 3rd person singular from ἀνταποδίδωμι, meaning, “to pay something back to someone as the result of an incurred obligation – ‘to repay, to pay back, to give back’”.)

When we challenge God and refuse to accept His teaching and His ways, it is as if He owes us an explanation. We think God should explain Himself and defend His

corner. It is as if we have given something to God – i.e., our good works, our worship – thus putting God under obligation to return or pay back the favour.

Of course, put like that, this is impossible. God is God and we are in no position to argue with Him. He owes us nothing. He is not obliged to us to give us a reason for His actions. The accounts of Job and Habakkuk inform us of the impossibility of exacting an explanation from God. He alone is sovereign.

Verse 36 *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”.*

ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

Here is Paul’s final statement in which he perfectly portrays the sovereign mind of God.

“For from him...” God alone is the originator of all things, i.e., creation, salvation for both Gentiles and Jews. He is the great source of all things; man can claim nothing of himself; salvation is all of God.

“.....and through him” That is through His grace and power that salvation comes to the Gentiles and to the Jews.

“...to him are all things”. All things are for His ultimate glory and praise.

Concluding Applications.

There are four areas of application that we can take to ourselves.

1. Note that in all of God’s dealings with either Gentiles or Jews, salvation is always through faith. Justification is through faith alone without works. There is not going to be a different way of salvation for the Jews in the future. It will be through faith just as it is today.

This is evident within this eleventh chapter of Romans. Notice the number of times that *“faith”* is referred to both in relation to the Gentiles and the Jews – vs 20 *“They were broken off because of their unbelief...but you stand fast*

through faith"; vs 23 "...if they do not continue in their unbelief"; vs 30 "Just as you were at one time disobedient (Greek root "unbelieving")...because of their disobedience"; vs 31 "...so they too have now been disobedient..."; vs 32 "For God has consigned all to disobedience.....".

God has only ever had only one way of salvation. There has never been or ever will be two methods. This one route into salvation is through faith. This applies to Gentiles the world over, whatever country, whatever ethnic group, and to all Jews both now and in the future.

This is a fundamental issue. Paul has laboured this all through the letter to the Romans. When you are thinking of how God saves people the world over do not fall into the trap of thinking that some people can be saved through their good works or any other means.

2. If there are any people who should be opposed to anti-Semitism it should be the Christian. Did you know that Friday 27 January was the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Russians in 1945?

On the basis of this chapter we should have a different attitude towards the Jews and Israel than the world around us. It is because of the Jews general rejection of Christ that we, Gentiles, have the Gospel and are the majority in the Kingdom of God.

One day God is going to create a vast blessing on the Jewish nation. We Christians must think about this; we must encourage missions to the Jews; we must look forward to this event coming to pass. The Jews are still a very important and precious people in the eyes of God.

3. Observe the doctrine of God that emerges from this passage. I refer in particular to verse 22, "*Note then the kindness and the severity of God...*". In our understanding of God we must have a balanced view. It is dangerous to hold a sloppy sentimental view of God which arises from thinking of Him merely in terms of "*love*". Yes, "*God is love*", but He is also "*light*". The "*Fatherhood*" of God must not allow us to consider Him as easy-going; sentimental; weak and complacent.

You will be aware of how Jesus referred spoke to God as His Father in the High Priestly prayer recorded in John 17. He said, “*holy Father*” (vs 11) , or “*righteous Father*” (vs 25). This is why Paul can say “*stand in fear*” (Rom 11:20).

There is the side of God which shows His “severity”. This is not generally liked today; not politically correct we might say. We do not like to think of the wrath of God; the anger of God; the chastising hand of God. We prefer to have a God who is pure love; who will overlook our sins and folly. But, if we want to believe in and worship the God who is there then we have no choice.

I ask this question. Is the God you worship the God of the OT? It is thought that in the OT the “*severity of God*” is seen more vividly. Can I ask you to read the book of Nahum and answer my question? Is this the God you believe in?

Look at the teaching in this chapter in reference to God breaking off the natural branches from the olive tree. He can do this and He did do this. But, He can and will graft them back in again. Note the “*kindness and severity of God*”.

4. Let us learn from this chapter that God’s ways are not our ways. Indeed, He acts in the most mysterious manner. You can never hope to rationalise God’s actions. This is what verses 34-36 are teaching us.

Indeed, in the whole of scripture we find a God who has a mind of His own. He is the God of the unexpected! At one moment He is concentrating on the Jews, then suddenly it is all reversed and the Gentiles become His focus of attention. Then, in this chapter we are told that God will act again in an astonishing manner by turning His focus on the Jews.

As you look at your own lives and what God does to you and through you He shows Himself to be most unpredictable. You cannot work Him out; you do not know what way He is going. This is the teaching of this chapter and in particular the grand statements made in verse 33.

As you look into the scriptures and try to comprehend its doctrine you are often baffled and confused. You feel like arguing with God; challenging Him and telling Him what He should do. But you cannot do this. Remember verse 34-35. He does not need you to be His counsellor; you cannot bargain with God. He has the right to do as He pleases – and He will (Rom 9)!.

This is our God!

Richard Lee. 26 January 2012