

Paul has shown to this point the fact that the true Israel of God is not determined by flesh and blood, but by a kindred spirit of faith in God. He has shown that the “remnant” has always been distinct from the fleshly Israel. In the final portion of Paul’s discussion regarding Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, he sums up all of these points to explain God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s infidelity.

“Has God Cast Away His People?” (11:1-6)

He begins with a question, **has God cast away His people?** To which he answers, **Certainly not!** (11:1a). If the remnant is in fact the true Israel, does this definition reflect God’s rejection of His people? Israel all throughout her history had rejected God! As in the days when they demanded a king, God declared, “they have rejected Me that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). Even this, however, did not mean that God rejected His people—His true people. Paul explains further, **For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin** (11:1b). Paul was a Jew. Peter was a Jew. The twelve

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were all Jews. The first churches in Jerusalem and throughout the world were composed of Jewish converts. Clearly, **God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew** (11:2). The promises of God’s blessings have always been directed to those faithful to Him. It is these, in His foreknowledge, that He has affirmed would have a relationship with Him.

These would be citizens of His eternal kingdom.

To illustrate this, Paul asks, **do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah** (11:2a)? After Elijah’s victory over the prophets of Baal, he fled for his life from Jezebel. In his anguish and discouragement he cried out, **Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life** (11:3; 1 Kings 19:14). Elijah, like many faithful souls, became discouraged when he saw how many all around him were unfaithful to the Lord. He allowed himself to think that he alone was faithful. In response, God declared, **I have reserved for Myself**

seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal (11:4; 1 Kings 19:18). What an amazing revelation. During a time when there is virtually no record of any who were faithful to God in the northern kingdom of Israel, there had in fact been 7000! God, had reserved them by His word working within them.

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Chapter Eleven

The Election of Grace

How does this relate to life under Christ and the problem with Israel? Paul explains, **at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace** (11:5). In the face of widespread rejection of God (as in the days of Elijah) “at this present” (i.e., in Paul’s day) men like Paul, Peter, the twelve, and other Jews who accepted Jesus were the “remnant.” In what sense was this an “election of grace”? Let us notice the meaning of the key words in this phrase. “Election,” in Gr. is the word *eklogē* meaning—“the act of picking out, choosing” (Thayer). “Grace,” from the Gr. word *charis* is defined, “that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness, goodwill, lovingkindness, favour” (Thayer). So it is the “choosing of goodwill.” It is God’s favor toward man in choosing a means to save those unworthy of salvation. We must divorce ourselves from the denominational idea of grace as something that “zaps” a person and

empowers him to overcome some supposed “sinful nature.” Grace is God doing good for us. When we deserve condemnation, the grace of God grants forgiveness.

This being the case, the “election” of God, did not come by fleshly inheritance. It did not come by deeds of merit. It was offered to those who did not deserve it. Thus, Paul says, **if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace** (11:6a). Is Paul saying that man does nothing to accept this grace? He told Titus that grace teaches us to “deny” ungodliness and “live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:12). In this same book, Paul told the Romans, “if you live according to the flesh you will die” (Rom. 8:13). It is “no longer of works” in the fact that it is no longer a matter of works of Mosaic Law (Gal. 2:16), as well as in the sense that works themselves become a matter of duty and not merit (Luke 17:10).

If salvation, i. e., the “election of grace” was not a matter of God’s grace (i. e., His act of goodness), but rather in payment for *services rendered*, then, **if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work** (11:6b). There is no support here for a “faith only” position. Every act of obedience to Christ, while expected, necessary, and a matter of duty, never constitutes a single work of merit that earns the grace of God. If that were the case, grace is “no longer grace.” That does not dismiss us from duty, but magnifies it! The child of God, in everything he does must say to himself, “you are not your own. You were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19b-20a).

Israel Has Not Obtained What it Seeks (11:7-21)

The mercy of God toward all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, created a unique situation. As a result of this **Israel** (i. e., “Israel according to the flesh”) **has not obtained what it seeks**; (i. e., to be right with God and His chosen people) **but the elect** (i. e., those of the “election of grace” whether Jew or Gentile) **have obtained it, and the rest were blinded** (11:7). Paul speaks of spiritual blindness in his second epistle to the Corinthians. In



“Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Matt. 24:28). The Roman eagle adorned the standards of the Roman legions.

3:14, speaking of the Jews, he writes that “their minds were blinded,” comparing the veil over their heads in the reading of the law, to something that impairs their sight. This condition was not impossible to change. He writes, “when one turns to the Lord the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 2:16). In the next chapter, Paul speaks of those in general who reject the gospel, as those “whose minds the god of this age has blinded” (2 Cor. 4:4). Is Paul teaching the Romans that both God and Satan (“the god of this age”) blind people? He paraphrases Deuteronomy 29:4

and Isaiah 29:10, “**God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, To this very day**” (11:8). We must understand Paul’s words here that God “gives” in the sense of allowance. God does not prevent any who desire to come to Him from being able to do so. He does allow man to go his own way in doing the will of Satan. In such a state men are blinded by sin and self-will. David illustrates this same blindness. Paul cites Psalm 69:22-23, “**Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always**” (11:10). This is a matter of choice, not divine imposition.

Israel “according to the flesh” had a choice. They had “stumbled” over the “stumbling-stone” (see Rom. 9:32). Yet, this did not have to mean that they had to “fall.” Paul asks, **have they stumbled that they should fall?** (11:11a). Their stumbling could be something that **through their fall**, might actually **provoke them to jealousy** in the realization that **salvation has come to the Gentiles** (11:11b). If this were the case, then **their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles** (11:12a). But, if their rejection of Jesus led to riches for the world, **how much more their fullness!** (11:12b). Not only is their obedience possible, it would be a blessing to those in Christ. Certainly this was the case. When those of great faith like Apollos, Timothy, Aquila, and Priscilla came to faith, it was a great blessing to their generation.

“I Speak to You Gentiles”

While throughout much of the epistle, Paul speaks to the brethren in Rome in consideration of their Jewish background (see Rom. 2:17),

now he speaks to them as Gentiles. He says, **I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them** (11:13-14). Undoubtedly, some of the brethren in Rome were Jews by ancestry, some were Gentile proselytes to Judaism who turned to Christ and others were Gentiles who had turned to Christ away from paganism. Paul addresses them here as “Gentiles” focusing on the point he is addressing in the text. He desires that his work may stir those Jews who have not accepted Jesus to do so.

Warning Against Arrogance

Although Paul, seeks to provoke the Jews to “jealousy” in order to move them to obey the gospel, he also makes certain that this does not lead Gentile Christians to arrogance. While the Jews **being cast away** had led to **the reconciling of the world**, he points out to them that the Jews’ **acceptance** would mean their **life from the dead** (11:15). Paul tells the Roman brethren, that the Jewish remnant as **the firstfruit is holy** and so **the lump** from which it came **is also holy** (11:16a). Paul uses the figure drawn from what is described in Mosaic Law. Loaves baked from fine flour and leaven were considered to be the “first-fruits” (Lev. 23:17). “Holy” (Gr. *hagios*) is simply being “set apart unto” God. He is not suggesting that they were saved in unbelief. Rather,

In Mosaic Law loaves baked with fine flour and leaven were considered “firstfruits” (Lev. 23:17). Paul uses this figure of the Jews.

the elements of their faith that set them apart under the Law of Moses, put them in a position in which their acceptance of the gospel should have been even easier than that of the Gentiles.

He continues, **and if the root is holy, so are the branches** (11:16b). He switches metaphors from “first-fruits” and the “lump” to a “root” and the “branches” growing out of the root. In order for the Gentiles to have a place in covenant with God, Paul says, **some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them** (11:17a). The acceptance of the Gentiles into a faith



Cultivated Olive Grove. Courtesy of HolyLandPhotos.org.

built upon the life and faith taught in the Law of Moses, is likened to a “wild” branch being grafted onto the “root” of Jewish faith. This should have been a humbling realization for the Gentile Christian. They were in no position to **boast against the branches** (11:18a). They had to remember **you do not support the root, but the root supports you** (11:18b). Their heritage could boast only idolatry. Their ancestors worshipped Jupiter or Apollo, not the true and living God. Even though they could claim that, **branches were broken off that I might be grafted**

in (11:19), it was **because of unbelief they were broken off** (11:20a). The Gentiles themselves could only be said to **stand by faith** (11:20b). They should **not be haughty, but fear** (11:20c). Paul explains, **for if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either** (11:21). If the mere physical ancestry of someone did not make him immune to being “broken off,” it is clear that one is not immune to being broken off if he simply obeys the gospel, then returns to sin.

The Goodness and Severity of God (11:22-32)

Paul calls upon the Romans to have a balanced estimation of themselves and of God’s very nature. He tells them to, **consider the goodness and severity of God** (11:22a). How important it is to recognize both aspects of God’s nature. “Goodness” (Gr. *chrēstotēs*) is rendered “goodness,” “kindness” and “gentleness” elsewhere in the King James Version. “Severity” (Gr. *apotomia*) means “severity, roughness, rigour” (Thayer). A failure to see either aspect of God’s nature is disastrous. The “one talent man” in the parable of the talents, allowed his view of the master as a “hard man” to lead him to inactivity (Matt. 25:24). On the other hand the workers in the vineyard who resented the master’s generosity in paying those who came late in the day the same as he paid them, had eyes that were “evil” because the master was “good” (Matt. 20:15). Seeing only the “goodness” of God could lead the Christian to say, let us “sin that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1). In so doing we forget, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). The only

accurate conception of God is the balanced recognition of both His “goodness and severity.”

In God’s treatment of both the Jew and the Gentile both aspects of His nature were revealed. Paul continues, **on those who fell, severity** (11:22a). The Jew enjoyed no “once a Jew, always a Jew relationship.” He was “severe” toward them in demanding they accept His terms. They must not stumble over the “stumbling-block.” He continues, **but toward you, goodness** (11:22c). In allowing the Gentiles, who like the Canaanites deserved to be annihilated, to be accepted into a covenant relationship with Him, He showed “goodness.” Yet, even this goodness was not without condition. They were obligated to **continue in His goodness. Otherwise they also will be cut off** (11:22d). This makes it clear that Christians must remain faithful. They cannot turn back to sin and “continue in His goodness.” This is not salvation by works, but the condition under which the “goodness” of God may be effectual toward us. If we refuse this condition, we too “will be cut off.”

In the same way, Israel’s condition is not irrevocable. God has not prohibited their access to the gospel. Instead, **they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in** (11:23). Paul returns again to the figure of the olive tree and the need to avoid arrogance. The fact that the Gentiles were **cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree** showed clearly that, if Jews would turn to Christ, those **who are natural branches** could even more readily **be grafted into**

their own olive tree (11:24). Paul uses “nature” (Gr. *phusis*) here much as he does in Ephesians 2:3 referring to “children of wrath.” It is not that the Gentiles had an innate nature that was wild and rebellious, rather, *phusis* can also refer to “a

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mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer). The Gentiles must understand **this mystery**, so that they might not let themselves **be wise in their own opinion** (11:25a). The reason that God had allowed this **blindness in part** to happen to **Israel** was so that **the fullness of the Gentiles might come in** (11:25b). If the Jews who rejected Jesus would



Emperor worship was practiced in temples like this temple of Trajan in Pergamum. Photo: Kyle Pope.

not continue to allow the “god of this age” to blind them, they too could “come in” to be in harmony with God.

“All Israel Will Be Saved”

Since the reestablishment of the nation of Israel, after World War II, some in the religious world have argued that the physical Israel continues to have a place in the scheme of redemption. They focus on Paul’s

declaration **so all Israel will be saved** (11:26a), and argue that in spite of unbelief they are still God’s people. This often spills into the political realm. One denominational preacher once claimed that “God will deal with the United States, as the United States deals with Israel!” Much of this comes from a misunderstanding of promises regarding the kingdom. In looking for a future coming kingdom, they fail to recognize that the church is the eternal kingdom promised to Daniel (Dan. 2:44). It existed in the First Century (Col. 1:13) and Christ now reigns as King over His kingdom (Matt. 28:18). While we may respect the nation of Israel as a democracy, we must reject any notion that they continue to represent God’s people in any sense.

The entire focus of this section has addressed the accurate definition of Israel. Paul began with the assertion, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6b). This distinguishes Israel “according to the flesh” and the “Israel of God.” He has repeatedly illustrated this through his emphasis on the “remnant,” distinguishing Israel as a nation from the “remnant” of the faithful. In this context Paul asserts, “all Israel will be saved.” Why after devoting three chapters to proving that Israel “according to the flesh” is not the remnant of Israel, whether Jew or Gentile, would he then redefine Israel once again as Israel “according to the flesh”? All of the true “Israel of God” will be saved, but no one who rejects belief in Jesus is of the “Israel of God” (Mark 16:16).

Such a view of Israel should not be used as justification for anti-Semitic attitudes. The foolish bigotry that has led to resentment of the Jewish people as “those who killed Jesus” is ungodly and a reflection of ignorance and carnal attitudes. Paul says of Israel “according to the flesh,” **concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers** (11:28). We can appreciate the connection the Jews have to the historical elements upon which faith in Christ is built. It would be foolish to deny or ignore all that God did leading to the coming of Jesus. These things cannot be undone. Paul says, **the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable** (11:29).

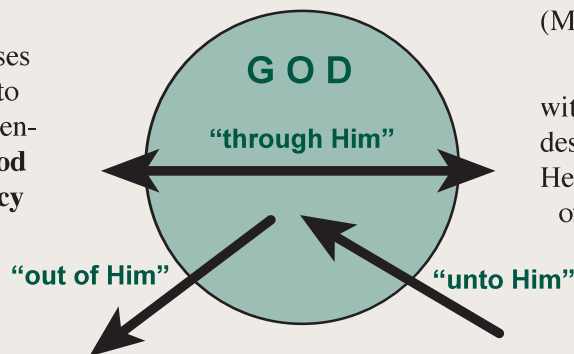
One final time, Paul addresses the way that is open to the Jew to be right with God. Just as the Gentile was **once disobedient to God** and yet had **now obtained mercy through the disobedience** of the Jew (11:30), even so in their disobedience **through the mercy shown to the Gentile they also may obtain mercy** (11:31). Paul describes God as having **committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all** (11:32). “Committed” (Gr. *sugkleiō*) means “to shut-up together, enclose” (Thayer). This same word is used of “enclosing” a large catch of fish (Luke 5:6), the Jews being “under guard by the law, kept (*sugkleiō*) for the faith which would afterward be revealed” (Gal. 3:23) and Scripture having “confined (*sugkleiō*) all under sin” (Gal. 3:22). This should not be understood in the sense of some direct, divine limita-

tion, but rather the sense of God in His providence allowing disobedience, so that He might grant mercy.

Praise Be To God (11:33-36).

God’s plan of redemption that allowed the Gentiles access to Him, while demanding that the Jews submit to His righteousness leads Paul to exclaim the praise of God. He joyously resounds, **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!** (11:33). It is humbling to hear the apostle through whom so many elements of

All Things Are...



the mind of God have been revealed to describe the ways of God as “past finding out!” If Paul himself recognized this about the Creator, how important it is for us to recognize that all that we can know of God is what He has revealed to us. It is the only standard that can grant us confidence and the only measure we can use to determine His will. All that lies beyond this revelation is “past finding out.” The Law of Moses declared, “the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and

to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

Paul continues this praise with two quotes. First from Isaiah 40:13, **“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?”** (11:34). No one can advise God. He is all wisdom. Who can know the fullness of his mind apart from revelation? He then quotes from Job 41:11, **“who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?”** (11:35). In this lies the whole dilemma of man’s accountability before God. None of us can offer God anything that He needs to merit forgiveness unto salvation. Jesus asks, “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:37).

Paul ends his praise of God with the use of three prepositions describing the magnificence of God. He declares, **of Him** (Gr. *ex*, lit. “out of”) **and through Him** (Gr. *dia*, lit. “through” although perhaps in the sense of agency, i.e., “by him”) **and to Him** (Gr. *eis*, lit. “into,” “unto,” or “for”) **are all things** (11:36a). There is nothing that takes place without either the direct action, allowance, or unto the glory of God. They flow “out of” Him. They operate “by” Him or “through” His omnipresence. They happen “for” Him or “unto” Him. How wonderful are His plans. How exalted is His wisdom. Through all of the freewill choices of His creation, He will bring to pass His desire in all things. He is truly worthy of **glory forever. Amen.** (11:36b).

Questions

1. What does Paul's reference to Elijah illustrate about the "remnant" of Israel (11:2-4)? _____

2. Explain the phrase "election of grace" (11:5): _____

3. In what sense is the "election of grace" no longer of works (11:6; Gal. 2:16; Luke 17:10)? _____

4. Who does Paul declare in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is responsible for blinding those to whom the gospel is veiled?

5. Explain why Paul speaks to the Romans as "Gentiles" after previously addressing them as Jews (11:13; 2:17).

6. Explain the terms "firstfruits" and "lump" in light of Leviticus 23:17 (11:16): _____

7. To what plant and part of a plant are the Gentiles compared (11:17)? _____
8. What does the fact that God did not "spare the natural branches" indicate for the Gentiles (11:21)? _____

9. List two aspects of God's nature that God has shown to the Jew and Gentile (11:22):
a. _____ b. _____
10. Upon what condition can the Israelites be "grafted in" (11:23)? _____

11. Explain the phrase, "all Israel will be saved" (11:26a): _____

- What does Romans 9:6b indicate about this? _____
12. What do the three prepositions in 11:36 illustrate about God's power? _____
