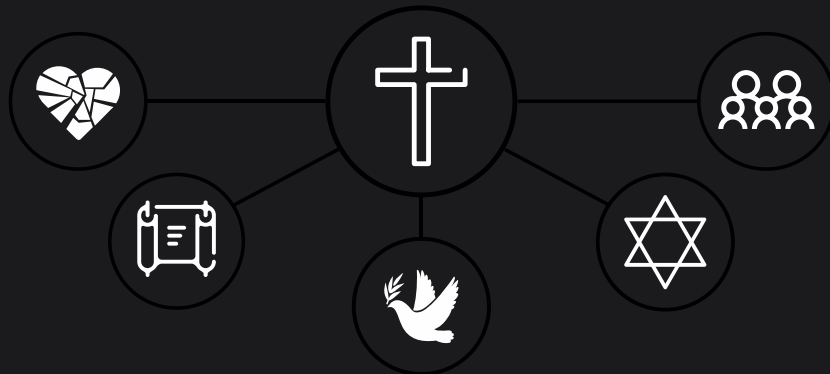




ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Title: Without Excuse

Text: Romans 11:1-16

Date: May 14, 2023

Main Idea: God has not rejected Israel but in His grace has both preserved a believing remnant and will work the salvation of the Gentiles for greater blessings for all, both Jews and Gentiles.

Personal Study Guide

READ ROMANS 11:1-16

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What words, phrases, or themes stand out to you in these verses? Do you see any that are repeated, and if so, why do you think Paul focused on them?
2. Recall what you have learned in previous chapters about Paul's heart for Israel. How does this continue the themes Paul has been discussing?
3. What question does Paul start the chapter with? Why is his response to this question so emphatic? How does this expand on or relate to what he has said in chapters 9 and 10?

Consider Paul's audience in the Church of Rome. How do you believe this would have impacted and maybe encouraged Jewish Christians in the church? How might it have challenged Greek/Gentile Christians?

Explain – What does this mean?

Having already explored, and at times come to painful conclusions about the current state of belief for the Jews, Paul provides some encouragement in

this passage by arguing (a) God has not rejected the Jews and (b) the presence of a remnant of believing Jews reminds us that God has future plans for the nation of Israel. He reaches this conclusion, in part, by drawing on Israel's past history through a range of Old Testament examples and quotations.

1. Paul utilizes a brief autobiographical statement in v. 1 to establish his own place within the story he is about to recount (for similar identifying statements see 2 Cor. 11:22 and Phil. 3:4-5). How does Paul's statement inform the argument he makes in this passage? What from his personal redemption story stands out to you as informing his belief God has not rejected His people?

2. Paul also draws on the story of Elijah following his encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel who in desperation/loneliness cries out to the Lord who in response reveals the presence of a remnant of faithful believers who also rejected Baal (see 1 Kings 19).
 - How does this story inform/reinforce Paul's argument in chapter 11? Why do you think Paul looked to this story to explain God's work and plan for Israel in his day?

 - What distinguishes the remnant described in v. 5-6? How does this relate to Paul's discussion of God's elect in chapter 9?

 - What does this teach us about God's grace and how it relates to the initial question of God's rejection of Israel?

3. Having established the context of Israel's history and God retaining a believing remnant, Paul focuses in v. 7-10 on a contrast between those

who believe and those who do not. Consider the implications of this analysis.

- What is the reason Paul gives for why Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking? Consider his statement about Israel in 10:3. What was Israel's role and responsibility in this?

- What action is Paul ascribing to God here? How does this challenge your understanding of God and His grace? Does it call to mind other themes Paul has emphasized in Romans?
 - Why does he refer to the "elect" in v. 7? What is he saying they obtained?

 - How does the reference to those who were "hardened" strike you? What other passages story does this call to mind?
 - Note: Stott indicates the hardening of hearts, while done by God, is in a certain sense a giving over to their own stubbornness or insistence on disobedience.

 - Consider the references in v. 8-10. What does this tell us about God's role in how those who are hardened come to be so?

- 4. Paul returns in v. 11-16 to his consideration of the Gentiles as he seeks to understand the full implications Israel's failure to obtain what it was seeking. What might this teach you about the scope of God's ultimate plan for salvation for both Jews and Gentiles?

- What question does he start this section with? What does it tell you that his answer is as emphatic as it was elsewhere?

- In v. 11, what does Paul say is the result of salvation coming to the Gentiles? Does the use of “jealous” surprise you? How might jealousy result in more Jews being saved (v. 14)?
 - Note: Stott unpacks the dynamic of jealousy by explaining that a desire for the good and blessings that come from salvation and a thriving relationship with the Lord would not be considered a negative but is a worthy goal/aim.

- How does Paul frame the implications for Jews of his call/ministry to Gentiles?

- When Paul specifically states he is speaking to Gentiles in v. 13, how would you state the message he is hoping to impart to them?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. How does Paul’s emphatic assertion that God did not reject His people encourage you, strengthen your faith, or help you understand the Lord better? What does this teach us about God?

2. Paul's hope that Israel's jealousy at the salvation of the Gentiles will ultimately result in more of his Jewish brethren being saved may strike us as unusual. Colin Kruse notes Paul echoes Deut. 32:21 in arguing that God will use this jealousy to bring about salvation. How do you see this jealousy as working to further salvation? Have you seen this dynamic at work in our day—how does a changed life awaken something in either unbelievers or those who have grown cold in their own walk?
3. Paul says in v. 5-6 the remnant is “chosen by grace” not by works. What does this teach us about the Lord? Why is it helpful for us to be reminded of the role of grace (and freedom for us from works)?

Respond – What's my next step?

- Do you know someone who could be described as having a “hardened heart” or being subject to a “spirit of stupor”? How can this passage provide a reminder and hope that God can still reach these people? Who has been on your heart to pray for their salvation?

- Reflect on how God's grace is central to this passage – both as a future hope for the Jews but also to the Gentiles who are now included in salvation. How does it change me to be reminded of this great grace?

Paul starts the passage with a question about God's rejection of Israel. He goes on to make clear it is not God who changed or failed but the people of Israel who failed. Instead, God was faithful (see 1 Sam. 12:22) and even used the situation to derive greater blessings for both the Jews and the Gentiles (11:11). How does this picture of a faithful God who blesses us so generously encourage you and/or spur you on to further obedience and growth?

Commentary: Romans 11:1-16 by John Stott

Note to Group Leaders: You also have your F.F. Bruce Commentary on Romans you were given on Team Night. You can use that one, in addition to this one, to help you grasp the text. Reach out to Courtney Reissig if you need one or haven't received yours.

a. The Significance of the Remnant, 11:1-10

In this part of the chapter Paul deals with the question, 'Did God reject his people?' This suggestion he emphatically rejects. He explains that God has always preserved a faithful remnant, among whom he himself is numbered, as were the seven thousand who did not bow the knee to Baal in the time of Elijah. This remnant Paul describes as a remnant chosen by grace, not on the basis of their works. The reason why the

remnant obtained the blessing of God and the others did not Paul attributes to God's action in choosing the former and hardening the latter.

11:1 Following on from his conclusion in chapter 10 that a major reason why Israel as a whole has not obeyed the gospel was her own obstinacy, Paul says: *I ask¹⁴⁵ then: Did God reject his people?*¹⁴⁶ If Israel rejected the gospel of God, the question is: Has God in turn rejected Israel? To this question the apostle responds with an emphatic, *By no means!* an expression denoting strong denial used here for the ninth time in Romans and found frequently elsewhere in this letter and other letters where the apostle expresses strong disagreement (cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). In her previous history Israel had to face the possibility that God had rejected his people, but in 2 Maccabees 6:16 at least it is asserted: 'He never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people' (cf. 1 Sam 12:22; Jer 31:37, LXX 38:35).

In support of his denial that God has rejected his people, Paul stresses: *I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.* This is one of three places in his letters where Paul describes himself along these lines. In 2 Corinthians 11:22, when asserting that he is in no way inferior to the false apostles troubling his converts, he says, 'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I'. In Philippians 3:4–5, when comparing himself with rivals, he adds: 'If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews'. If Paul is an Israelite, and if he has experienced the blessing of God through acceptance of the gospel, then clearly God has not rejected his people.¹⁴⁷

Paul introduces himself not only as a descendant of Abraham but also as one 'from the tribe of Benjamin' (cf. Phil 3:4–5). Various suggestions have been made concerning the significance of Paul's inclusion of the information that he is 'from the tribe of

¹⁴⁵ The NIV's 'I ask' translates *legō* (lit. 'I say'), which Jewett, *Romans*, 653, regards as an indication that the letter was intended to be read (by 'a trained scribe employed by Phoebe').

¹⁴⁶ 'People' (*laos*) is preferred to the alternate textual variant, 'inheritance' (*klēronomia*), in 11:1. However, Mark D. Given, 'Restoring the Inheritance in Romans 11:1', *JBL* 118 (1999) 91–96, argues in favor of *klēronomia* on the grounds that: (i) it is the earliest attested reading (P⁴⁶), (ii) and that as the more obscure reading it cannot be explained in terms of transcriptional probabilities. Furthermore, he notes that (iii) *laos* and *klēronomia* are twin designations of Israel in Deuteronomy and in Deuteronomic history (Deut 9:26–29; 32:8–9), (iv) that Israel as both God's people (*laos*) and inheritance (*klēronomia*) is 'a pervasive and comforting reminder of the permanence' of the relationship between Israel and her God, and (v) that 'the very vocabulary of the fully restored echo of Ps 93(94):14 in Rom 11:1–2 is a reminder that though God frequently rejects his people, he will never *finally* reject them, not even the majority in favour of a remnant'—all of which, we might add, serves Paul's purpose in Romans 11.

LXX Septuagint

¹⁴⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhus points out: 'Paul could have supported his statement by referring to the 3,000 who believed at Jerusalem and to the many thousands spoken of by St. James, not to mention all those Jews of the diaspora who believed the message. But instead he uses himself as an example' ('Interpretation of the Letter to the Romans' [ACCSR, 285]).

Benjamin'. It has been noted that Benjamin was 'one of the few tribes left in his day that could trace their ancestry all the way back, being from the southern tribes, who returned after the Babylonian exile'.¹⁴⁸ Alternatively this may simply be part of a traditional self-introduction in which a person would provide not only his father's name but also that of his tribe.¹⁴⁹

11:2–6 In these verses Paul reinforces the assertion made in 11:1 by adding: *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew*. The reference to God's not rejecting his people appears to be a quotation from 1 Samuel 12:22 ('For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people'; cf. Ps 94:14, LXX 93:14). The reference to 'his people, whom he foreknew' in this context refers to the nation Israel. Contrary to what the present situation in which the majority in Israel had rejected the gospel might indicate, God has not rejected his people. In this context God's foreknowledge relates to the nation, not to individuals.¹⁵⁰ To 'foreknow' can mean simply 'know someone or something beforehand' (as, e.g., in Wis 8:8; 18:6; Acts. 26:5; and 2 Pet 3:17) or 'choose beforehand' (as in 8:29; 1 Pet 1:20), and it is used in latter sense here in 11:2.

Paul reinforces the assertion that God has not rejected his people by appeal to Scripture (1 Kgs 19:10, 14, 18). First he recalls Elijah's complaint to God about the rebellious character of Israel: *Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel?* The reference is to 1 Kings 19, which recounts Elijah's flight from Jezebel, who threatened the prophet's life following his successful contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah made his way to 'the mountain of God', where 'the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"' (1 Kgs 19:9). Paul then quotes Elijah's reply to this question: *'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'* (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). It would appear that Paul saw in Elijah's response something analogous to the erroneous conclusion some of his Jewish contemporaries might draw from his gospel, that is, that God had rejected Israel. To reinforce his assertion that this was certainly not true, Paul cites the Lord's response to Elijah. He introduces it with the question: *And what was God's answer to him?* (lit. 'but what says the oracle to him?'). The word 'oracle' is found only here in the NT, where it clearly denotes a divine oracle.¹⁵¹ Then he reproduces the oracle: *'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal'* (1 Kgs 19:18).¹⁵² Although Elijah thought that the whole nation of Israel had turned away from

¹⁴⁸ Wright, 'Romans', 675.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 635.

LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, II, 545; Witherington, *Romans*, 264–65.

lit. literally

¹⁵¹ Cf. 2 Macc 2:4: 'the prophet, having received an oracle [*chrēmatisation*], ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him'.

¹⁵² Paul's quotations correspond exactly to no known text, neither the LXX codices nor the Lucianic tradition, nor even the MT. Christopher D. Stanley, 'The Significance of Romans 11:3–4 for the Text History of the LXX Book of Kingdoms', *JBL* 112 (1993) 52–54, following a discussion of the textual tradition, concludes: 'The evidence seems strong that the Greek text quoted by Paul in Rom 11:3–4 reflects an earlier stage in the textual history of 3 Kingdoms than the

God and that he was the only faithful Israelite left, this was not the case. The Lord had preserved for himself a faithful remnant numbering seven thousand.

Finally in 11:5, to apply the Scripture to the matter at hand, Paul says: *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace* (lit. 'So also in this way in the present time there is a remnant according to election of grace'). The word 'remnant' is found only here in the NT,¹⁵³ and only twice in the LXX, where it means 'survivors'.¹⁵⁴ Paul says that just as there was a remnant in Elijah's time because God reserved them for himself (11:4), so 'at the present time' there was a remnant because they were chosen by the grace of God (11:5). The expression 'at the present time' used here and in 3:26 ('he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus') carries overtones of the 'eschatological now'; the time when God acts in history to effect salvation.¹⁵⁵

The remnant, Paul notes, is 'chosen by grace'. He has already spoken of God's 'election' in relation to his choice of Jacob and not Esau 'before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls' (9:11–12). That text made it clear that election is independent of the good or bad done by the one chosen; God's sovereign choice is determinative. Paul says something similar here in 11:6: *And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace*. He emphasizes that God's choice is determined by God's grace, and is independent of people's works. 'Works' here probably refers to Jewish attempts to establish righteousness by observance of the law—something Paul says they were doing instead of submitting to God's righteousness (cf. 9:30–10:4).

11:7–10 In these verses Paul turns his attention from the remnant chosen by grace (those who have responded to the gospel) to explain why Israel as a whole failed to

version that appears in the codices (the so-called "LXX" text). The majority tradition of 3 Kingdoms 19 would then represent a later "Hebraizing" revision of a rather loose Greek translation of the type used by Paul in Rom 11:3–4'. He further concludes: 'The line of development thus runs from the Pauline text through the "Lucianic" tradition to the version that appears in the great codices of the fourth and fifth centuries' (54).

lit. literally

¹⁵³ The word translated 'remnant' here is *leimma*. Paul uses a different, albeit a cognate word (*hypoleimma*) when speaking of a remnant in 9:27 ('Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved" '). It is noteworthy that Paul refers to the remnant in 9:27 to explain the diminished number of the faithful in Israel, whereas in 11:5 he employs it to emphasize God's faithfulness and grace (cf. Byrne, *Romans*, 330).

LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁴ Cf. 2 Sam 21:2: 'Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors (*leimmatos*) of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to [spare] them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them'; 2 Kgs 19:4: 'It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant (*leimmatos*) that still survives'.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Jewett, *Romans*, 658.

obtain what they sought when the elect did. In 9:30–10:4 the apostle said one reason why this was so was that ‘they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own; they did not submit to God’s righteousness’. Here in 11:7–10 he gives another reason: *What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but others were hardened.* Paul mentions three entities: the people of Israel, the elect within Israel, and those who are hardened. As he did in 10:2, Paul acknowledges Israel’s earnest seeking, but says that what they earnestly sought they did not obtain (cf. 9:31). However, here he says that while ‘the elect’ (i.e., the [Jewish] remnant chosen by grace) did obtain it, ‘the others’ were hardened.

In 9:17–18 Paul spoke of God raising up Pharaoh to display his power in him so that God’s name might be proclaimed in all the earth, adding that ‘God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden’. From this hardening it would seem Pharaoh did not escape. But this may not be entirely the case when Paul speaks of the hardening of the ‘rest’ in 11:8. Later in the chapter he speaks of a ‘hardening’ experienced in part (or for a while) by Israel ‘until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved’ (11:25–26). Paul’s hope was that, though Israel as a national entity was hardened, some of his kinsfolk who were presently in that hardened state would repent and find salvation.¹⁵⁶

When Paul says that ‘the others’ did not obtain it because they ‘were hardened’, he uses the passive voice, suggesting that they were hardened by God. This the apostle makes explicit when he provides scriptural support for it: *as it is written: ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day’.* Paul’s ‘quotation’ draws in part upon Isaiah 29:10—the reference to ‘a spirit of deep sleep’—but mainly upon Deuteronomy 29:4 NRSV (LXX 29:3)—the reference to Israel not being given ‘eyes to see or ears to hear’.

In Deuteronomy 29:2–8 Moses recalls God’s care for the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness, reminding them: ‘With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those signs and great wonders’ (Deut 29:3). However, Moses indicates that, despite these things, the Israelites still lacked understanding, when he adds, ‘But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear’ (Deut 29:4). It is this text that Paul picks up, adding to it words drawn from Isaiah 29:10, to explain the resistance of Jewish people to the gospel in his own day—God gave them a spirit of stupor, and eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear. Moses said of the Israelites that this state of affairs persisted ‘to this day’, and

¹⁵⁶ Wright, ‘Romans’, 677, argues that hardening ‘is what happens during a temporary suspension of the judgment that would otherwise have fallen, to allow time for some to escape. In the case of Pharaoh, the result was the exodus from Egypt, seen as a sign of God’s glorious power and the reputation of the divine name (9:17) In the present case, the result is that there is time not only for the Gentiles to come in (11:11–15), but also for more Jews, like Paul himself, to recognize that the risen Jesus is indeed Israel’s Messiah and to serve him in “the obedience of faith” ’.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

LXX Septuagint

Paul, confronted by the intransigence of his contemporary kinsfolk, saw a similar state of affairs persisting in his day.¹⁵⁷

To further support his explanation of his Jewish contemporaries' failure to obtain what they sought, Paul adds to his quotation from Isaiah 29:10/Deuteronomy 29:4 one from the Psalms (thus making use of the three sections of the OT, the law, the prophets, and the writings):¹⁵⁸ *And David says: 'May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever'*. Paul's quotation follows fairly closely, but not exactly, Psalm 69:22–23 (LXX 68:23–24),¹⁵⁹ a psalm in which David calls upon God to punish those who have persecuted him. It is not easy to see how Paul wanted this quotation to function here. 'Their table' in Psalm 69:22 and its significance for Paul has been variously interpreted: (i) as a tablecloth spread on the ground over which one might trip;¹⁶⁰ (ii) as the Jewish cultus representing Jewish piety that causes the blinding of Israel;¹⁶¹ (iii) a reference to Pharisaic rules for table fellowship—their attempt to maintain purity by such works proved to be a stumbling block preventing them from accepting the gospel.¹⁶² The latter two suggestions read too much into Paul's use of this quotation, and we should probably recognize that he simply intends his audience to see a parallel between what God himself does (gives people a spirit of stupor, eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear) and what David asks God to do to his enemies (to use the good thing they enjoy to put a stumbling block in their path).

b. Israel Stumbled, but Her Fall Is Not Irrevocable, 11:11–36

¹⁵⁷ Paul makes a similar point using similar expressions in 2 Cor. 3:14–15 when speaking of the dullness of mind and the veil that covers the heart of many of his fellow Jews when they hear the Scriptures read: 'But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts'.

¹⁵⁸ Mary Ann Getty, 'Paul on the Covenants and the Future of Israel', *BTB* 17 (1987) 98, noting that Paul quotes from the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, remarks: 'The law (cf. Deut 29:3 in Rom 11:8a), the Prophets (Isa 29:10 in Rom 11:8b) and the writings (Ps 69:22–23 in Rom 11:9–10) all conspire to call Israel to repentance. Far from giving up on Israel, God through the Jewish scriptures as well as the mission of Paul and the conversion of the Gentiles, is still acting in fidelity to the covenants. The individual and concerted meaning of these quotations is the constancy of God'.

LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁹ Origen comments: 'The trap is not mentioned either in the Hebrew or in the Septuagint. We have recorded these things about the order of the words and the quality of the witnesses consulted in order to show by these details that the authority of the apostle does not rely on the texts of the Hebrew nor does it always retain the words of the translators, but rather it expounds the meaning of the Scriptures in whatever words are most suitable' ('Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans' [ACCSR, 288]).

¹⁶⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 606.

¹⁶¹ Käsemann, *Romans*, 302.

¹⁶² Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 643.

This second part of the chapter may be subdivided into four sections: 11:11–15, in which an assurance is given that Israel's present situation is not final; 11:16–24, in which two metaphors are employed to illustrate the fact that God has not rejected Israel; 11:25–32, in which Paul spells out the mystery—Israel's hardening will give way to 'all Israel' being saved; and 11:33–36, the concluding section, in which the apostle expresses praise for God's wisdom. Paul will show that Israel's failure is part of God's plan, arguing that it allows salvation to come to the Gentiles, and that he hopes this will make Israel jealous, and will in turn lead her to repentance and salvation. Moo is correct when he says that 'the issue in vv. 11ff. is therefore not "Can the hardened within Israel still be saved?" but "Can Israel as a whole still be saved?" As the contrast with the Gentiles throughout vv. 11–32 suggests, Paul is thinking mainly in terms of corporate bodies, not in terms of individuals within those bodies'.¹⁶³

(i) *Israel's transgression means salvation for the Gentiles, 11:11–15*

David's request that God place a stumbling block in the path of his enemies in the psalm that Paul quoted in 11:9–10 provides the link to what follows in 11:11–15. Here the apostle explains that the stumbling of Israel provided the occasion for carrying the message of salvation to the Gentiles. If their stumbling had this beneficial effect, Paul says their restoration will signal even greater blessing.

11:11–12 Picking up the reference to stumbling in 11:9–10, Paul raises the question about the results of Israel's stumbling: *Again I ask: Did they stumble¹⁶⁴ so as to fall beyond recovery?*¹⁶⁵ Paul asks if God's action in giving Israel eyes that cannot see, and ears that cannot hear, and causing them to stumble was intended to cause them to fall 'beyond recovery'. When Israel rejected the gospel, she 'stumbled over the stumbling stone' placed in Zion (9:32–33). Paul's question is whether this stumbling will result in a fall from which there is no recovery, a rejection by God and therefore spiritual ruin.¹⁶⁶ To this question Paul replies: *Not at all!* (an expression he uses for emphatic denial and found here for the tenth time in Romans; see the commentary on 11:1).

Paul insists that this is not the case and that God has a wider and more positive purpose to achieve through Israel's stumbling: *Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.* This is reflected in Paul's missionary experience as described in the Acts of the Apostles. When Jewish people in a particular location 'transgressed' by rejecting the gospel message, Paul felt that, having discharged his responsibility to preach 'first to the Jews', he could then turn his attention to the Gentiles (cf. Acts. 13:42–49). However, for Paul salvation coming to the Gentiles was not simply an end in itself but was also intended 'to make Israel envious'. Paul's point is that Jews, when they see Gentiles experiencing the blessing

¹⁶³ Moo, *Romans*, 686.

¹⁶⁴ The verb translated 'stumble' is *ptaiō*, used only here in Paul's letters but found elsewhere in the NT in contexts where stumbling into sin is involved (Jas 2:10; 3:2; 2 Pet 1:10).

¹⁶⁵ The NIV's 'so as to fall beyond recovery' translates *hina pesōsin* (lit. 'in order that they may fall').

¹⁶⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 686–87.

of God as they accept the gospel, might become jealous and then hopefully repent and become recipients of the gospel blessings themselves.

Paul then explains what he hopes will be the upshot of all this: *But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*¹⁶⁷ Israel's 'transgression' in refusing to obey the gospel call meant loss for them but great riches for the world as Gentiles accepted the gospel and enjoyed its blessings. Being sure that God has not rejected his people, Paul anticipates a time when Israel will attain her 'fullness'. In 11:25 the apostle speaks of the time when 'the full number of the Gentiles has come in', by which he means clearly the totality of those Gentiles who believe. In the light of this use of 'fullness' in respect to Gentiles in 11:25 we are justified in concluding that Israel's 'full inclusion' means the full number of believing Jews, which will be made up when those yet to believe are added to the remnant that already believe.¹⁶⁸

When the full number of the elect of Israel will have repented and believed in their Messiah, their 'fullness' will signal even greater riches.¹⁶⁹ The nature of these greater riches remains to be explained. Some hints of what these riches will comprise emerge as this chapter unfolds.

11:13–14 In these verses Paul addresses those members of the Roman church who are Gentiles (just as earlier in the letter he had addressed those 'who know the law'; cf. 7:1): *I am talking to you Gentiles.*¹⁷⁰ The reason for addressing them directly may be that he realized that they might be resistant to what he has to say about Israel. Shortly he will warn them not to adopt a boastful attitude towards unbelieving Jews (11:17–24), but before doing so he tells of his hope that his ministry among the Gentiles will bring benefits to Jews: *Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.* When he says that he is the apostle to the Gentiles, he is recalling both his commission by the risen Christ (1:1–6; Gal. 1:1, 15–16; Acts. 9:15–17; 22:14–15, 21) and its recognition by the pillar apostles of Jerusalem (Gal. 2:6–9). By so saying, Paul informs the Gentile members of the Roman church of one of the important strategies he has in prosecuting a mission in the Gentile world, that is, to arouse his own people, the Jews, to jealousy with a view to saving some of them. The idea of provoking Jews to

¹⁶⁷ Haacker, 'Die Geschichtstheologie von Röm 9–11', 220–21, notes certain parallels in the writings of Philo, namely, *Vit. Mos.* 2:43–44: 'It is but natural that when people are not flourishing their belongings to some degree are under a cloud. But, if a fresh start should be made to brighter prospects, how great a change for the better might we expect to see!'

¹⁶⁸ So too, Moo, *Romans*, 689; Witherington, *Romans*, 267–68; Wright, 'Romans', 680–81.

¹⁶⁹ Terence L. Donaldson, ' "Riches for the Gentiles" (Rom 11:12): Israel's Rejection and Paul's Gentile Mission', *JBL* 112 (1993) 94, suggests that 'the logic at work in Paul's statements here is not the spatial logic of displacement but the temporal logic of delay. Israel's failure to respond to the gospel makes possible the "riches for the Gentiles" by opening up not some space but some *time*. If Israel had responded to the gospel immediately, if God had not been prepared to harden all but the remnant, the Gentiles would have remained branches of the wild olive tree and vessels fitted for destruction'.

¹⁷⁰ 'To you' (*hymen*) is in the emphatic position, making it very clear that the apostle is addressing these remarks only to the Gentile members of his audience.

jealousy is one Paul has already employed in 10:19, where he cites Moses' words in Deuteronomy 32:21 to show that God is going to make Israel envious by blessing Gentiles while he brings judgment upon the Jews. It is possible that Paul was encouraged by the divine strategy of Deuteronomy 32:21 to vigorously pursue his Gentile mission in the hope of making his fellow Jews jealous as they saw Gentiles enjoying the blessings of God through acceptance of the gospel.¹⁷¹ He hoped that they would become envious, would repent and accept the gospel, and some of them would be saved.

Several interpreters have commented on Paul's realism when he says that he hopes his ministry among the Gentiles will result in the salvation of 'some of them'.¹⁷² It has also been noted that Paul says 'I am *an* apostle to the Gentiles' (NRSV, italics added), not 'I am *the* apostle to the Gentiles' (NIV, italics added). He did not regard himself as the only apostle to the Gentiles.¹⁷³

11:15 That Israel, currently resistant to the gospel, should ultimately be saved is a glorious prospect for Paul. This is what lies behind his question: *For if their rejection brought reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?* On first reading the apostle's reference here to the 'rejection' of Israel appears to contradict what he said back in 11:1–2: 'I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew'. However, the overall context in Romans 11 makes it clear that the issue addressed in 11:1–2 is that of ultimate rejection, whereas in 11:15 Paul has in mind a temporary rejection.¹⁷⁴ Thus the apostle's question in this verse could be paraphrased as follows: 'If Israel's (temporary) rejection (by God)

¹⁷¹ Wright, *Deuteronomy* 16 (cf. 301), comments on Paul's mission strategy: 'Paul picks up a rhetorical pun in Deuteronomy 32:21, on God making Israel "jealous", and develops it into a theology of history and mission: the ingathering of the Gentiles will arouse jealousy among the Jews, so that ultimately "all Israel", extended and inclusive of believing Jews and Gentiles, will share in salvation (Rom. 10:19–11:26). Clearly Paul reflected deeply on Deuteronomy 32 especially (it has been called "Romans in a nutshell") and quotes its final doxology (32:34) in his exposition of the multinational nature of the gospel and its implications for the need for cross-cultural acceptance and sensitivity between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Rom. 15:7–10)'.

¹⁷² So, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 692; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 657; Witherington, *Romans*, 268; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 80.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

NIV New International Version

¹⁷³ Cf. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 656.

¹⁷⁴ Verena Jegher-Bucher, 'Erwählung und Verwerfung im Römerbrief? Eine Untersuchung von Röm 11,11–15', *TZ* 47 (1991) 329–34, argues that *apobolē* in 11:15 should not be translated as 'rejection', but rather as 'loss', and that this enables one to understand 11:11–15 in terms, not of Israel's rejection by God, but the loss of Israel as Paul's co-worker in the mission of God vis-à-vis the world. Thus, if the loss of Israel as co-worker has meant gain for the Gentiles, Paul asks, what will their reinstatement as co-workers in God's redemption of the world mean but life from the dead? There seems to be little in the context to support this view.

has led to the reconciliation of the world, that is, the reconciliation of Gentiles, what will Israel's reacceptance (by God)¹⁷⁵ be but life from the dead?

The 'reconciliation of the world' has been interpreted in different ways. Cranfield believes that it is better to take it 'to refer to the objective reconciliation of the world to God through the death of Christ than to either the subjective reconciliation of conversion (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–20) or the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:16)'.¹⁷⁶ Dunn agrees in part: 'Paul no doubt has in mind the death of Christ (5:10), though here once again we should avoid either-or exegesis ... since it is unlikely that if the point was put to him Paul would want to exclude the idea of reconciliation accepted ... or of a world reconciled as including the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile ...; in Paul's gospel and theology these strands are too closely interwoven to be easily separated (here not least)'....¹⁷⁷ However, in the context of 11:13–15 where Paul has in mind the stumbling of Israel making possible the salvation of Gentiles, it is probably the salvation of the Gentiles that Paul has in mind primarily when he refers to the 'reconciliation of the world'.

As already noted above, in Paul's mission it was the rejection of the gospel by the Jews that led him to preach to the Gentiles, resulting in their salvation. If Jewish rejection of the gospel and their (temporary) rejection by God had this positive result for the Gentiles, Paul asks, what will be the result of their acceptance (of the gospel) and their ultimate acceptance by God? The result, Paul says, will be 'life from the dead', a reference, it would seem, to the general resurrection.¹⁷⁸ When the full number of the elect of Israel is accepted by God, then will have arrived the time of 'life from the dead', that is, the resurrection of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles (see the commentary on 11:25–27).

ADDITIONAL NOTE: ISRAEL'S JEALOUSY

The predominant view of Israel's jealousy as Paul depicts it in 11:11–14, and the view adopted above, is a positive one: Israel, seeing the Gentiles responding to the gospel and enjoying the blessings first promised to her, will become envious, and this will lead some of her people to repentance and a share in those blessings. As Munck put it long ago, the 'no' of the Jews to the message of the gospel will lead to the 'yes' of the Gentiles, and this in turn will lead to the ultimate 'yes' of the Jews.¹⁷⁹ Paul's hope was that his mission to the Gentiles would have the effect of provoking Israel to jealousy, and this in turn would lead to her repentance and a share in the blessings of the gospel.

¹⁷⁵ BAGD, *ad loc.*, interprets *proslēmpsis* here as 'acceptance into a relationship, *acceptance* (by God)'.

¹⁷⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, II, 562.

¹⁷⁷ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 657.

¹⁷⁸ So, too, Byrne, *Romans*, 339–40; Moo, *Romans*, 694–96; Witherington, *Romans*, 269; Barrett, *Romans*, 215; Jewett, *Romans*, 681. Bell, *The Irrevocable Call of God*, 254–256, holds that 'Life from the dead' means 'the general resurrection of the dead and the everlasting life in fellowship with God and Christ'.

¹⁷⁹ Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 275–78.

In recent times this approach has been called into question, and the jealousy of Israel is seen not as a positive thing leading to her salvation, but a negative thing leading to the salvation of the Gentiles. As in the case of Deuteronomy 32:21 quoted by Paul in 10:19 (see the commentary on that text), Israel's jealousy is a sign of God's judgment. Baker offers the following explanation of this view. He notes first the close connection between the verb 'to provoke to jealousy' used by Paul in 11:14 and the noun 'zeal' employed by the apostle in 10:2 when he spoke of the Jews' zeal for God that was not according to knowledge, and suggests that Paul saw a connection between Israel's jealousy and their misplaced zeal. Baker concludes: 'For Paul, then, in both Rom 10:19 and 11:11, 14, Israel's jealousy and zeal may coalesce: when Israel sees the community of salvation extended to the Gentiles and the place of Christ in defining that community, Paul envisions Israel being provoked to angry jealousy in which it zealously upholds Torah'.¹⁸⁰ The problem with this view is that it does not account satisfactorily for Paul's statement, 'I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them'. He does not envisage them being provoked to jealousy to uphold Torah.¹

Additional Resources:

Podcast: [Knowing Faith Podcast: Episode #139: Romans 11:1-24](#)

Course: [Michael Kruger on Romans 11 \(class outline and lecture\)](#)

¹⁸⁰ Murray Baker, 'Paul and the Salvation of Israel: Paul's Ministry, the Motif of Jealousy, and Israel's Yes', *CBQ* 67 (2005) 474–75.

¹ Colin G. Kruse, [Paul's Letter to the Romans](#), ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 421–432.