

The Book of Romans Study Guide

Chapter 11 part2

At the beginning of this study, we saw how the audience was a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles, although the Jewish believers had recently returned from a forced exile by Rome, which left only the Gentile believers to lead the congregation. Because of this changing social environment, Paul senses that tension could arise, especially for Gentiles who misunderstand the implications of the generally negative response of Jews to the gospel.

11:13-22

v 13 Paul now addresses them directly.

v 14-15 He reiterates the theme in v. 11 regarding moving the Jewish people to jealousy as a path to salvation. Only now, it is personal to Paul, not just theological.

v 16 Paul uses two analogies to emphasize that Israel's current spiritual state does not cancel God's long-term commitment to them. He argues that if a small, representative part of something like the first piece of dough or the root of a tree is "holy" (consecrated or set apart by God), then the entire whole is inherently linked to that same status

v 17 Paul introduces the theme of the olive tree as a metaphor representing the people of God, and the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles. Believing Gentiles are depicted as wild olive branches grafted in to an existing or natural olive tree, symbolizing faithful Jewish people. By describing natural branches being broken off and wild branches being grafted in, he illustrates his statement in verse 11 about Israel's stumbling leading to the salvation of Gentiles.

That grafting in also enables Gentiles to benefit from the root of the tree. Some commentators interpret the root as being Yeshua. But the problem with that view is that the natural branches were already part of the tree before they were broken off. So, if the root is Yeshua, it implies that unbelieving Israel was once "in Messiah" and then lost that connection, and that would contradict his words in 8:1 where he declares that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua."

A better interpretation is that the root represents the Abrahamic Covenant and the patriarchs. By being grafted in, Gentiles do not become ethnically Jewish but gain access to the spiritual inheritance and promises originally lodged with Israel. This view emphasizes that the "tree" is the single, ongoing program of God's redemptive grace throughout history. And that is consistent with the Abrahamic Covenant being a blessing to all the families of the earth, as well as Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:15 that believing Jews and Gentiles become "one new man." It is also consistent with verses 28-29, where Paul explicitly states that the Jewish people are "beloved for the sake of their forefathers" and that their "gifts and calling are irrevocable."

v 18-22 Paul issues a strong warning to Gentiles who become arrogant (v. 18). This term (*katakauchaomai*) literally means "having your head up high" because it comes from a root for the "neck." It is a posture of perceived superiority, in contrast with the posture of humility,

in which you lower your head, thus reducing visibility of your neck. Arrogance, in this understanding, is having an attitude in which you consider yourself to be more significant than what you actually are.

He specifically warns Gentile Christians not to be arrogant toward the people of Israel and not to be “conceited, but fear” (v. 20). And then he shows that failing to heed that warning can lead to them being “cut off” (v. 22). That phrase is used in many places in Scripture regarding capital punishment or permanent exclusion from the community, but the basic concept of being cut off means the end of existence. So, Paul is warning Gentile Christian individuals, churches and denominations not to be arrogant toward the Jewish people, because it invites being cut off from the olive tree, meaning the people of God.

- v 23-24 He concludes his discussion on the olive tree by saying that if God can graft Gentiles as wild olives into the tree of the people of God, He can surely graft believing Jewish natural branches back into the tree. And that reality should put an end to the speculation that God has rejected Israel forever. They are being restored to their original purpose and heritage, united with Gentile believers in one people of God, rather than being replaced by a brand-new entity called the church.

11:25-36

- v 25 Paul announces a mystery, which is a divine secret previously hidden but now revealed. Israel has experienced a partial hardening, which is the same word used in verse 7. That means the part of Israel that is not the remnant has a spiritual callousness, but it is not complete and it is not permanent. That hardening of Israel will persist “until” the full, God-appointed number of Gentiles have come to faith.

- v 26-27 Once this “fullness” is reached, the hardening on Israel will be lifted, leading to the climactic salvation of “all Israel.” The meaning of “all Israel” has been well debated. Contextually, the phrase is used 153 times in the Tanakh, and without exception, it refers to the entire community of the twelve tribes of national Israel as a collective body. Among them, there was a faithful remnant and typically an unfaithful majority.

The same phrase only appears in the New Testament twice, with Romans 9:6 as the other instance, where Paul is talking about “his kinsmen according to the flesh,” and again, among them is a saved remnant (9:27). Contextually, then, here is 11:26, Paul is talking about the salvation of the entire community of national Israel, not a redefined concept of the church as spiritualized Israel.

Once again, the concept of the remnant informs our understanding. The Hebrew word for the remnant, *she'ar*, shares the same root as *se'or*, which is one of the words translated as leaven, and literally means to “swell up.” In that regard, Paul is describing the coming day when the remnant will swell up to the point of encompassing the entirety of national Israel. Paul, then, quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 to show that this coming day was foretold by the prophets.

- v 28-29 Even though it seemed that in Paul’s day the Jews were enemies of God, He still loves them because of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then, by saying, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,” Paul is asserting that God does not change His mind. If He gave a gift (the covenantal privileges) and issued a calling (to be

His people), He will not withdraw them just because of a period of human unfaithfulness.

v 30-32 Paul cautions Gentile believers once more by pointing out that because they received mercy while in a state of disobedience, they should extend the same sense of graciousness to Jewish people who need God's mercy.

v 33-36 Paul concludes this incredible thesis by acknowledging that human intellect cannot fully grasp God's strategies. Then, he amplifies that fact by quoting from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11, which shows that God does not need human advice to run the universe.

And, in the final verse, he affirms the Lord is the Sustainer and the one who works out history, and He is the ultimate goal of all things. Thus, the entire complicated history of Israel, the Gentiles, the "stumbling," the "hardening" and the "fullness" exists for one purpose: to bring glory to God forever.