

Center for Global Ministries

Romans Study Guide

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Romans 11: The Future of Israel after
Being Rejected in this Age

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Romans 11 The Future of Israel

The discussion of Romans 10 may lead someone to conclude that God is through with Israel, but Paul clarifies the issue by showing that many of Israel are being saved now, even as God focuses on the Gentiles, and a day is coming when they will return to His special focus. The major theme of the context is not an individual salvation, but a sovereign choice to give the opportunity for salvation to the world.

I. Does the unbelief of Israel, in general, mean Israel, as a whole, has been rejected? (11:1-10)

A. Can anyone in Israel be saved? (11:1-6)

¹NET **Rom 11:1** So I ask, God has **not rejected his people**, has he? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

² God has not **rejected** his people whom he **foreknew**! Do you not know what the scripture says about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left and they are seeking my life!"

⁴ But what was the divine response to him? "I have **kept for myself** seven thousand people who have not bent the knee to Baal."

⁵ **So in the same way at the present time** there is a remnant chosen by grace.

⁶ And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

11:1 Does this sovereign choice have anything to do with individual salvation? Absolutely not! God's election of the Gentile people does not mean that a non-chosen people, Israel, cannot be saved individually. Individuals are never "rejected" (*apothomai*, "thrust away, repel, repudiate" in the aorist tense meaning a definitive past act). In God's plan for 2000 years He chose Israel alone as His focus, but anyone could have been saved (i.e. Nineveh, etc). Now God has chosen the Gentiles, but anyone can be saved. Paul was saved as were thousands of Jews in the first century, in spite of being part of a nation that God had not chosen.

^{NET} **Psalm 94:14** Certainly the LORD does not forsake his people; he does not abandon the nation that belongs to him.

^{NET} **Jeremiah 31:37** The LORD says, "I will not reject all the descendants of Israel because of all that they have done. That could only happen if the heavens above could be measured or the foundations of the earth below could all be explored," says the LORD.

What does God's sovereign choice of the Gentiles mean?

11:2-3 Did the rejection of Israel affect God's sovereign choice? This is an additional proof that the context is not dealing primarily with individual salvation. If God is willing to show mercy to the Gentiles (9:19-20) it does not mean Israel is rejected forever. It is interesting to see that Israel is *foreknew*, but lost! (*proginosko*, "to have knowledge beforehand" – There is no indication of making or forcing this knowledge of things to come to pass – Aorist tense indicating a past action). Notice that the foreknowledge did not mean their individual salvation. The remnant of true believers were always present even when the nation was lost in apostasy.

11:4-5 In spite of the sovereign rejection, even in the OT, individuals were saved, albeit, unknown to Elijah. The phrase "kept for myself" refers to a special group of believers (*kataleipto*, "leave behind, leave in reserve, or to sail past a place without stopping").

The 7,000 (1 Ki 19:18) from Israel may have either been dispersed in Israel or had already migrated into Judah. The illustration is used to show that likewise in Paul's day there was a faithful remnant of true believers from among the Jews even though the nation had rejected her Messiah.

^{NET} **Amos 3:2** "I have chosen you alone from all the clans of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

The concept of "chosen or elect" merely refers to God's choices, but they cannot be pressed to refer to individual salvation every time. In this chapter it refers to both: 11:28, Israel is an enemy of the gospel, but still the *elect*, obviously not referring to salvation, but a chosen people for a purpose.

- In this age God has elected or chosen the Gentiles. What does this mean for individual salvation?

11:6 Classic definition of grace: has nothing to do with works. It has nothing to do with striving to be good or deserving, otherwise it is works. The two do not mix, nor is it 50/50, but rather one or the other. It was not a question of "goodness" that motivated God to choose the Gentiles, but rather pure grace. (Rom 4:4-5; 9:30-32).

- As has been shown (Rom 1-3) no one, Jew or Gentile, can be good enough to merit salvation. Why does Paul interject the definition of grace here?

II. Israel's rejection resulted in a general hardening and blindness of the nation (11:7-10)

^{NET} **Rom 11:7** What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was diligently seeking, but the elect obtained it. The rest were hardened,

⁸ as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, to this very day."

⁹ And David says, "Let their table become a snare and trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;

¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they may not see, and make their backs bend continually."

11:7-8 The elect obtained God's righteousness, but the unbelieving were hardened and blinded (See 11:25). The spirit of "stupor" (*katanyxeos*, "a numbness resulting from a sting"), blindness and deafness (Isa 6:9-10) was given to the ten tribes of Israel in 722 BC when they were dispersed in captivity after years of rejecting God's prophets to get them to repent. This same attitude prevailed throughout Jesus' ministry (John 5:40).

- The belief that they could be good enough made them resent and reject any teaching of the need for grace and forgiveness. Do people think they are good enough today?

11:9-10 The false notion of self-righteousness trapped Israel into unbelief as a nation.

Unwilling to admit their own unrighteousness, they prided themselves in their own goodness and acceptability before God. Their resentment of being considered sinners needing another's and divine righteousness, provoked a spirit of rebellion and rejection and left them under the burden of unresolved personal guilt. How does self-justification lead someone to react when contradicted or confronted with their sin? Does this happen today?

III. Jewish Rejection is Gentile Blessing (11:11-12)

^{NET} **Rom 11:11** I ask then, they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous.

¹² Now if their transgression means riches for the world and their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full restoration bring?

11:11 Nationally, Israel's rejection gave the offer of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul is anticipating another question from his readers. The tense of the verb "fall" along with "stumble" imply a falling beyond reach or recovery. The implied answer is "no."¹ "They" (v. 11) refer to Israel (excluding the remnant- v. 5). Their "transgression" (*paraptoma*, "to fall beside or near something, a deviation from truth") was to be temporary. This is the same word used to refer to the "trespass" of Adam that condemned the human race (Rom 5:17-18, 20). As a result God chose the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. How should "jealousy" motivate Israel to respond as a nation?

11:12 A future day of unimaginable blessing is coming to both Jews and Gentiles. Here we have a relative comparison, which if maintained, when Israel is reinstated, a comparable exaltation of the Gentiles likewise will occur. What these "riches" refer to is speculation, but it is going to be significant. The "restoration" of Israel (11:25-26) refers to the salvation of Israel at the beginning of the millennium. The national focus is consistent throughout this context.

- The restoration of God's choice or election of Israel again will not mean every individual will be saved, but they will be blessed. Is God's goodness only for the saved? (Compare James 1:17 with Rom 2:4)

IV. Hope for Israel as God promises a future sovereign decision to reinstate Israel (11:13-32)

^{NET} **Rom 11:13** Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Seeing that I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,
¹⁴ if somehow I could provoke my people to jealousy and save some of **them**.
¹⁵ For if **their** rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will **their** acceptance be but life from the dead?
¹⁶ If the first portion of the dough offered is holy, then the whole batch is holy, and if the root is holy, so too are the branches.

11:13-14 Paul's ministry to Gentiles. Now Paul addresses the Gentiles in Rome. Paul was "magnifying" his ministry to make the Jews jealous (Rom 11:11) The fact that there would be a special Apostle to Gentiles was unheard of or unimaginable in Jewish thinking that God would do such a thing.

- What was Paul's strategy to save some Jews in a context of national rejection?
- How did Paul seek to make the Jews jealous?
- What did Paul mean by the "reconciliation of all mankind" (2 Cor 5:18-20)? Is this a potential reconciliation or an offering of reconciliation to the world?

11:15-16 Future reinstatement of Israel will mean exceptional blessings to Gentiles.

Once again the comparison is made of restoration of Israel (believers) with the parallel exaltation of the Gentiles (believers). Is this a reference to the resurrection or the beginning of the millennium?

What are the metaphors used and their meaning?

Resurrection (compare Ezek 37:4-13, the "dry bones" returning)

Baker What results in the offering of the dough in Ezek 44:30?

Horticulture: The prophet who most used the metaphor of the "branches" was Ezekiel. See 17:23-24. What is the "dry tree" and why does God restore it?

¹ This is the 10th and last time of Paul's use of a rhetorical question that demands the negative response (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 14; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1).

- ¹⁷ Now **if** some of the branches were broken off, and you, a **wild olive shoot**, were grafted in among them and participated in the richness of the **olive root**,
- ¹⁸ do not boast over the branches. But if **you** boast, remember that **you** do not support the root, but the root supports **you**.
- ¹⁹ Then **you** will say, "The branches were **broken off** so that I could be grafted in."
- ²⁰ Granted! They were **broken off** because of their **unbelief**, but you stand by **faith**. Do not be **arrogant**, but **fear!**
- ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, **perhaps** he will not spare you.

11:17 Metaphor of branches of the olive tree and grafting in of wild branches. Elaborating on the horticulture metaphor Paul describes the global decisions of God to offer His salvation to the world. What do the branches, wild olive shoot and olive root refer to? (Note the "you" in 11:13)

- Normally a branch of a cultivate olive tree is grafted into a wild olive tree, rather than this illustration, which is why this is considered "contrary to nature" (Rom 11:24).

Identify each of the following:

- Branches
- Wild Olive
- Natural Olive

11:18-19 National (not individual) boasting of privileges is without warrant. The "you" refer to Gentiles branches (the "we" – "you" subjects in Romans often refer to national groups), not individuals. Three reasons for not boasting: (1) The Gentiles are dependent entirely on the choices of the Horticulturalist, (2) the branches are not independent, but rather cannot live without the source of life in the root, that is, the Gentiles are dependent on the Jewish foundation, (3) Don't think that you Gentiles are better than the natural Jewish branches. It is just His grace that has opened the door to the Gentiles.

- Does being grafted into the olive tree mean the Gentiles are saved?
- Note: a metaphor cannot be pressed to mean something beyond their primary purpose.

11:20-21 God's national choice of which people to uniquely bless is not eternal. This is not a choice of individual salvation, but which group to grant special opportunities to participate in His offer of righteousness.

- When the Jewish nation chose unbelief, God granted the opportunity to the Gentiles to demonstrate their faith.
- Faith eliminates any possibility of "arrogance" (*hupselophroneo*, "proud, high minded or haughty"), that is, thinking that there was something good or acceptable in any Gentile.
- The "fear" (*phobeo*, "to terrify, frighten") again is national and temporal, that is, at any given time God could chose to revert back to His focus on the Jews.
- In this context it is clear that this is not speaking of individuals, thus this does not refer to someone losing their salvation.
- In Greek this is a first-class conditional statement, which means that the "if" is assumed to be true – the context spoke of Israel's "fall" (11:11), "loss" (11:12) and "rejection" (11:15), the "branches have been broken off" (11:17) because "of unbelief" (11:20), thus God's sovereign choice was just, so He could do the same for the Gentiles.

What would God be looking for among the Gentiles that would demonstrate their faith to continue His mercy to them?

²² Notice therefore the **kindness** and **harshness** of God– harshness toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, **provided you** continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be **cut off**.

²³ And even they– if they do not continue in their unbelief– will be grafted in, for **God is able** to graft them in again.

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

11:22 Kindness (God's offer of blessings) and harshness (hardening due to their unbelief) are not guaranteed. The "therefore" indicates this verse is a summary verse. Paul is explaining the wisdom of God's choice to put aside Israel for a time. What two characteristics of God should motivate us to be thankful for the opportunity to know God and His Word?

(1)

(2)

Some words that need to be understood in these verses:

- Kindness (*chrestoteta*, "benevolence in action") What has God done to show "kindness"?
- Harshness (*apotomian*, "sternness, severity, roughness"). This is the only NT use. As an adverb Paul used it of how he had to correct the Corinthians (2 Cor 13:10) and for how Titus was to correct error in the churches (Titus 1:13). What has God done to show His "harshness"?
- Cut off (*ekkopto*, metaphorically, "to cut off occasion, be hindered" – Aorist passive). Who did God "cut off"? When?

What is the threat given in v. 22? Does this mean you could lose your salvation?

11:23-24 Conditional future status of God's blessings (none of which have anything to do with individual salvation!) Would it be easier or more difficult for God to reverse the situation and return to a special focus on Israel?

- The olive tree is not the church, but the life of God in His promises (^{NET} **2 Peter 1:4** "Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature")
- As easy as it was to shift His focus to the Gentiles, so it will be just as easy for God to shift back to the Jews.
- What is the purpose of His kindness now?

²⁵ For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not **be conceited**: A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the **full number** of the Gentiles has come in.

²⁶ And so **all Israel will be saved**, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.

²⁷ And this is **my covenant** with them, when I take away their sins."

11:25 The mystery of Israel's future is revealed. Israel's refusal to believe is temporary, even though a few individuals would repent and believe. A mystery is a truth not previously revealed (^{NET} **Ephesians 3:9** "and to enlighten everyone about God's secret plan—a secret that has been hidden for ages in God who has created all things"). The mystery in Ephesians 3 is the creation of the Church – a new entity made up of Jews and Gentiles.

- Why is an understanding of God's mysteries so important, especially to the Gentiles?
- They mystery: God's purpose in this age is for "some from every tongue, tribe and nation" to be saved (still unfulfilled). So now two facts are revealed concerning God's dealing with Israel:
 1. It is partial
 2. It is temporary
- "Partial hardening" (*porosis*, "dulling perception, covering with a callus, obtrusiveness of mental discernment"). This leaves the door open to individuals who could freely respond to the truth, if they chose.
- "Until" (*achri*, "a temporal future condition") refers to a specific condition that will be met some day in the future when the conditions will be reversed.
- "Full number" or "fullness" of the Gentiles (*pleroma*, "filling up, all it contains"). Is this the condition in Matt 24:14?

11:26-27 The promise of a future national salvation or deliverance to Israel. The context is dealing with the contrast between the Gentiles and Israel. If Israel is the church, then the

sense is redundant and nonsensical: of course the church will be saved. Israel refers to the nation of Israel. What are the benefits and promises of the restoration of Israel?

1. What will happen to the nation of Israel?
2. How is ungodliness removed from Israel?
3. How will Israel's sins be taken away?
 - The word "saved" also means "delivered" – probably with reference to the terrible days of the end times and the Tribulation when the Deliverer, the Messiah, will preserve His people Israel as He returns to intervening on their behalf.
 - This probably does not refer to the complete salvation of all Israel soterically, since His return will initiate a judgment on Israel which will include the removal of Jewish rebels (Ezek 20:34-38)
 - Following this judgment God will remove godlessness and sins from the nation as He establishes His New Covenant with Israel at the beginning of the millennium:
 - ^{ET} **Jeremiah 31:33** "But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land," says the LORD. "I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people. ³⁴ "People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me," says the LORD. "For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done."
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²⁸ In regard to the gospel they are **enemies** for your sake, but in regard to **election** they are dearly loved for the sake of the fathers.

²⁹ For the **gifts and the call** of God are irrevocable.

³⁰ Just as you were formerly disobedient to God, but have now received mercy **due to** their disobedience,

³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.

³² For **God has consigned all people to disobedience** so that he may show mercy to them all.

11:28-29 Presently Israel is an enemy of the gospel, but their election (as a nation) remains firm because God's choices don't change. Elect but lost! That is a challenge for the Calvinist! Because they were chosen (elect) they are "dearly loved" though totally undeserving of it and yet they remain unsaved.

- God does not revoke what He has given, nor change whom He has chosen (Rom 1:6; 8:30). What are the "gifts" in this passage?
- What is the "call" in this passage?
- What is the meaning of characteristic of God in this context?

11:30-32 Today there is no distinction between Gentiles and Jews, in that they are all condemned in unbelief, but equally and individually enabled to be saved through faith, when they hear the gospel (10:10-14).

- When Adam disobeyed (5:19) all were constituted sinners (see Eph 2:2; 5:6).
- Israel now as a nation is disobedient to God, just as the Gentiles are.
- God's mercy to the Gentiles will reach a full number (11:25), then Israel will again receive mercy. Is this a specific number?
- In order to be just in all His dealings, God has "consigned" (*sugkleio*, "shut up together, enclosed, shut up on all sides"—Aorist tense) everyone on earth under an equal condemnation or disobedience (*apeitheia*, "disbelief, obstinacy, obstinate opposition to the divine will"). What is the result of the conclusion in 3:22, "there is no _____." Between whom?

V. Praise for God's Sovereign Choices (11:33-36)

^{NET} **Rom 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways!

³⁴ For who has known the **mind of the Lord**, or who has been his **counselor**?

³⁵ Or who has **first given to God**, that God needs to repay him?

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

11:33-34 God's plan is beyond human design or imagination. No human being could have devised such a perfect plan for the salvation of all men. "Wisdom and knowledge" are the What and Why of what He does. "Judgments" and "ways" are the How of what He does.

11:35 God owes no one (individual or national group) because his giving to them makes them indebted to Him, not visa versa.

^{NET} **Job 41:11** (Who has confronted me that I should repay? Everything under heaven belongs to me!)

- In this context, what does being indebted to God (and not the opposite) have to do with the subject? See these verses:
- Rom 1:14
- Rom 4:4-5
- Who else are we debtors to? Rom 15:27

11:36 The entire blessing of God makes us totally indebted to Him. God is the first Cause, the effective Cause and the final Cause of everything.

^{NET} **John 1:3** All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

^{NET} **Colossians 1:16** for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him— all things, ... were created through him and for him.

^{NET} **Revelation 5:12** all of whom were singing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the lamb who was killed to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise!" ¹³ Then I heard every creature— in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all that is in them— singing: "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and ruling power forever and ever!"