

Chapter 5

Preliminary Steps in Identifying the Qāhāl

(Step 4: Romans 11)

Step 4 in Identifying the Qāhāl

Step 4: Paul and Israel

Romans 11: Israel and the Covenants

The general theme of Romans 11 is Israel. More specifically, Paul deals with Israel's current unbelief and how this is to be explained in view of the covenants and promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament.¹ Although different ways of outlining the chapter have been suggested, the following five sections provide a good working structure:

Israel's Fall Is Partial: 1-10

Israel's Fall Is Temporary: 11-16

The Olive Tree Analogy: 17-21

Israel's Restoration: 22-32

Paul's Doxology: 33-36

Only a partial exegesis is presented here.

1 Chapters 9-11 of Romans must be construed together as a section of the letter. In 9:1-5 Paul explicitly mentions Israel's "patriarchs" and the "covenants" and "promises" made to them. So the question addressed by him in chapter 11 is how Israel's unbelief is to be explained in view of those covenants and promises: "Did God reject his people?" (11:1). The addressees of Paul's letter to the Romans are probably a mixture of both Jewish believers and Gentiles; see Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 242-245. The explanation Paul offers in chapter 11 might seem to be more relevant to the Jewish component of the church, but Paul definitely thinks it is relevant to the Gentile believers as well, since he issues a stern warning directly to them (11:13-24).

Israel's Fall Is Partial: The Remnant

Although many Jews accepted the Messianic salvation offered them by Jesus and his apostles, the majority did not. How does Paul explain this?²

1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the *passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.³

A majority within Israel may have rejected their Messiah, but God had not rejected the nation of Israel. They were still "His people whom He foreknew."⁴ The illustration of Elijah demonstrates that during times of apostasy God had always preserved a remnant within Israel that remained faithful to him.⁵ Therefore, the nature of Paul's proof of his negative answer in verses 1-2 centers on the current remnant, of which he himself was a member:

Immediate proof that Israel has not been rejected is

2 One of the best exegetical treatments of Romans 11 is found in John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), II:65-108. I quote him often in this chapter. Unfortunately, however, he was not premillennial, and he did not address the future of Israel after its conversion in 11:26. In particular, he makes no reference to a national restoration to the land promised Israel in the Abrahamic covenant as an everlasting possession. Nevertheless he is correct in most of his conclusions in the exegesis of Romans 11.

3 Rom. 11:1-6.

4 Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:66: "Paul's question is in terms that are reminiscent of the Old Testament passages which affirm that God will not cast off his people (I Sam. 12:22; Psalm 94:14 (LXX 93:14); cf. Jer. 31:37)."

5 The remnant theme is familiar in the prophets: e.g., Isa. 6:8-13; 10:20-23; 11:10-11; 37:30-35; Jer. 23:1-4; Amos 5:14-15; Mic. 2:12-13; 7:18-20; Hag. 1:12-15; Zech. 8:6-13.

the biblical principle that there is "at this time a remnant chosen by grace" (v. 5). This sovereign preservation is the guarantee of the preservation of the nation as a whole in the future.⁶

John Murray agrees. Despite the present apostasy, the present remnant proves that national Israel as a whole remains the people of God:

This example [of the remnant in Elijah's day] is adduced to prove that God had not cast off Israel as his chosen and beloved people. The import, therefore, is that the salvation of a small remnant from the total mass is sufficient proof that the people **as a nation** had not been cast off.⁷

So, then, the majority within Israel stumbled. Was this fall irrevocable? What was the result of the fall?

Israel's Fall Is Temporary

Paul continues:

11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen 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 piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the

6 Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), p. 256. Horner continues, "But it is vitally important to understand also that although the present remnant justifies God's ongoing faithfulness, the subsequent teaching here indicates that this is in no way meant to convey His final satisfaction with a remnant, even as v. 23 seems to suggest. Rather there will ultimately be Israel's 'fulfillment' (v. 12), Israel's 'resurrection' (v. 15), that is, the salvation of 'all Israel' (v. 26)."

7 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:69; emphasis added.

branches are too.⁸

Paul argues here that Israel did not fall irrevocably.⁹ Moreover, God used her fall to send salvation to the Gentiles, which in turn would provoke Israel to jealousy.¹⁰ Then in verse 15 he makes an argument from the lesser to the greater: if Israel's temporary fall brought salvation to the Gentiles, how much more of a blessing to the entire world will be her restoration?¹¹ Note that this restoration of Israel must be as extensive as the current

8 Rom. 11:11-16.

9 In the expression, *ὡς πεσῶσιν*, "in order that they might fall, *πεσῶσιν* is a 3rd person plural 2 aorist active subjunctive of *πίπτω*, to fall. In general, *ὡς* can be used in different ways. (1) *ὡς* can be used in an *ecbatic* sense denoting mere result or consequence. Then the translation would be, "...stumble merely that they might fall?" (2) *ὡς* can also be used in a *telic* sense denoting intention or purpose. The translation would then be, "...stumble in order that they might fall?" Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, IV:394, accepts both as possible interpretations. He does suggest, however, that if *ὡς* is taken in the latter sense, this implies an intended sharp distinction between *πίπτω*, to stumble, to trip, and *πίπτω*, thus taking the latter in the sense of to fall completely or permanently. Commentators are divided. Frederic Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1892), p. 399, takes the latter sense: "Consequently the meaning can only be this: 'Have they stumbled so as to leave forever their position as God's people?'" Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:75, n. 18, rejects this interpretation and argues that "what Paul is reflecting on here is the more ultimate and gracious design in the stumbling and fall of the mass of Israel at the time with which he is dealing." On this view, the meaning would be, "they did not stumble merely to fall but rather for God to send salvation to the Gentiles in order to make them jealous and restore them. On either interpretation, however, the passage argues that Israel's fall is not irrevocable.

10 As Paul states in vv. 13-14, this was the pattern observed in his ministry in the Book of Acts: 13:46; 18:6; 28:28. Concerning provoking Israel to jealousy, Paul is again thinking of Deut. 32:21, which he had already quoted in Rom. 10:19. How does this work? Murray suggests, "The idea is that the Jews observing the favour and blessing of God bestowed upon the Gentiles and the privileges of the kingdom of God accruing therefrom will be moved to emulation and thereby induced to turn to the Lord. It is eminently proper to emulate such gifts as the faith of the gospel secures" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, II:77). A case can be made that due to the growth of arrogance in the Gentile church, despite Paul's warning against such arrogance (vv. 18, 20), and especially the arrogance in the form of replacement theology, Israel has not become envious or jealous at all. Consider David L. Larsen's comment in "A Celebration of the Lord Our God's Role in the Future of Israel," in *Israel: The Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), p. 319: "Christian love, instead of arrogance, ought to foster 'envy or jealousy' among the Jews for what Christians possess in Christ (Rom. 11:11). How frequently has this

unbelief within Israel:

In terms of the whole passage, as noted repeatedly, this must refer to Israel as a whole and implies that this restoration is commensurate in scale with Israel's rejection, the restoration of the mass of Israel in contrast with the "casting off."¹²

As the bulk of the nation of Israel is now in unbelief, though remaining part of the nation, so in the future the restoration must be as extensive as the current unbelief: the nation as a whole will be restored to belief.

Verse 16 is transitional. In it Paul introduces two metaphors or analogies to explain in greater detail the points he has just made: "If the first piece of dough [firstfruits] is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too." The two metaphors, therefore, are these:

phenomenon been in evidence in Christian history or now?" The answer is obvious.

11 In vv. 11-12 and then again in v. 15, Paul makes reference to two blessings of the Gentiles, the latter greater than the former. The former, lesser blessing comes to the Gentiles during the interadvent period and Israel's partial and temporary fall. The latter, greater blessing comes to the Gentiles at the second advent and Israel's "fulfillment" or restoration when "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). Just prior to the second advent, according to Matt. 24:14, the gospel will have preached to all nations. What, then, could these greater blessings be that will flow to the Gentiles as a result of Israel's return to faith at the second advent? Appendix 3 in the section, "The Gentiles: Individuals and Nations," has an extensive study of this question. In brief, during the interadvent period Gentiles are saved as individuals, while at the second advent Gentiles will be saved as nations, this being a far greater blessing. This great blessing at the second advent is predicted in Old Testament prophecy (e.g., Zech. 2:10-12). However, Murray's remarks on this greater blessing are somewhat vague, probably because his eschatology relies very little on the Old Testament. For example, he states that it is an "unwarranted assumption that 'the fullness of the Gentiles' is the consummation of blessing for the Gentiles and leaves room for no further expansion of gospel blessing" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, II:95). Compare this with his statement on p. 79: "...we should expect that the enlarged blessing would be the expansion of the success attending the gospel and of the kingdom of God." Again, in commenting on "life from the dead" in v. 15, he suggests that it is "an unprecedented quickening for the world in the expansion and success of the gospel" (p. 84). These comments are all true, but he fails to recognize that the content of this "expansion of the success attending the gospel" at the second advent is the salvation of Gentiles as *nations*.

12 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:81.

- The first of the dough (the "firstfruits") and the remainder of the batch of dough from which it came¹³
- The root and its branches (of an olive tree)

These two analogies are discussed in Appendix 2. The following points are argued at some length:

- The firstfruits and lump are parallel to the root and branches respectively. Thus only two objects are symbolized. That is, both the firstfruits and root symbolize the first object, and both the lump and branches symbolize the second object.
- The first object, which is symbolized by the firstfruits of the first metaphor and the root of the second metaphor, is the patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- The second object, which is symbolized by the lump of the first metaphor and the branches of the second metaphor is ethnic, national Israel.

It is also argued in Appendix 2 that both metaphors are used by Paul to establish the same point: since the first symbol and its referent in each metaphor are obviously holy (consecrated), then the second symbol and its referent in each metaphor must also be holy (consecrated). Thus these two metaphors are used by Paul to picture or symbolize the complete and ever-abiding consecration of the nation of Israel as a whole, thus implying her ultimate salvation despite the current unbelief of its majority.

In giving more detail, however, Paul develops only the olive tree analogy.

The Olive Tree Analogy

As argued at some length in Appendix 2, the focus of this metaphor is limited by verse 16 to the root and the branches and therefore the olive tree per se does not have an independent meaning separate and distinct from its

¹³ See Num. 15:17-21.

branches. Rather, it becomes equivalent to those branches. Since the total of all the branches clearly represents national Israel, the olive tree likewise becomes a symbol of national Israel.

16 If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.¹⁴

The "branches" in verse 16 are those Paul later in verse 21 calls "natural branches." Verses 17, 18, and 19 also refer to the natural branches, and the tree bearing the natural branches is called in verse 24 a "cultivated olive tree."¹⁵ In verse 17 Paul continues his interest in "branches" but now introduces "wild branches" into the metaphor.¹⁶ Therefore, while the focus of his metaphor is still the root and the natural branches, to depict what Paul wants to explain requires some branches from a wild olive tree, also referred to in verse 24. Thus there are three components to Paul's metaphor: the root, natural branches, and wild branches.

In the olive-tree metaphor, what was described earlier by Paul as the "fall" of the bulk of national Israel (v. 11) and God's punitive "rejection" of that group in unbelief (v. 15) is now described as breaking off some, but not all, of the natural branches from the cultivated olive

14 Rom. 11:16-21.

15 Based on v. 16, this tree could be called the "holy" or "consecrated" olive tree. However, in the olive-tree metaphor, it is called in v. 24 a "cultivated olive tree."

16 The Greek for "wild olive" (NASB) is *αγριελαιος*, actually meaning "wild olive tree" (AG, p. 13). However, Paul clearly means wild branches from a wild olive tree. This is an important exegetical clue that Paul does not draw a distinction in meaning, significance, or symbolic reference between "branches" and "tree." Again, refer to the more extensive argumentation in Appendix 2.

tree, making the remnant of verse 5 the only natural branches remaining on the tree.¹⁷

Therefore, the first important conclusion is this:

As the total of the natural branches represents the entirety of the nation of Israel, so the cultivated olive tree likewise represents Israel, that is, the descendants of Jacob--the covenant nation of Israel.¹⁸

As a consequence of some of the natural branches having been broken off from the cultivated olive tree, branches from a "wild" olive tree are grafted into the cultivated olive tree among those natural branches that still remain on it, namely, the "remnant" of verse 5. Since the root is holy, all the natural branches are holy, even those cut off from the tree, and the wild branches as a result of the engrafting become holy.

What do these wild branches represent? In the context Israel's partial "fall" resulted in salvation being sent to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous (verses 11-12, 15). The olive-tree metaphor depicts this fall as the cutting off of some of the natural branches. Therefore, it must depict salvation being sent to the Gentiles as the grafting in of wild branches. These wild branches must

17 Since Paul insists in v. 5 that there is a "remnant" of believing Jews, it cannot be that all the natural branches were broken off the olive tree in unbelief. This is also clear from Paul's statement that the wild branches were grafted in "among the others," among the natural branches that were not broken off. Therefore, the natural branches must represent the entirety of the nation of Israel. The bulk of those who constitute Israel have been broken off but not that part of Israel represented by "the remnant." Similarly, the wild branches grafted into the olive tree represent a segment of Gentiles from among the nations of the world.

18 This conclusion is much debated among scholars. The position taken here is that the focus of this metaphor is limited by v. 16 to the root and the natural branches and that therefore the olive tree per se does not have an independent meaning distinct from its natural branches. Rather, it becomes equivalent to its branches. Since, then, the total of all the natural branches clearly represents national Israel, the olive tree becomes likewise a symbol of national Israel. See the extended argumentation for this view in Appendix 2, especially the section, "The Olive Tree."

then refer to the Gentiles.

If the first conclusion is correct, there is simply no way to avoid the second important conclusion:

Believing Gentiles during this interadvent period are grafted into Israel.¹⁹

It is vital to add, however, that this is not to say that believing Gentiles become Israelites or that ethnic Israel somehow loses its national identity as the people of God, as she is called in verse 1. After being grafted in, the wild branches remain wild branches on the Israelite olive tree, and the distinction between the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations with regard to God's promises will continue even into the eschaton.²⁰ Rather, Gentiles are "grafted into Israel" in the very limited sense of sharing Israel's covenantal spiritual blessings of salvation during the interadvent period.²¹ This sense is stated briefly in chapter 7 and is fully developed, defined, and delimited in Appendix 3.

19 This conclusion is also much debated among scholars, and within dispensationalism it is categorically denied. Again, this issue is discussed at some length in Appendix 2, especially in the section, "The Debate Over the Meaning of the Olive Tree."

20 See, e.g., Isa. 2:1-5; 65:17-19; Zeph. 3:20; Zech. 8:13; 14:16-19. Gal. 3:28 is often cited to prove there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile, especially in God's eschatological program. However, as Fruchtenbaum correctly states, "The context of this passage deals with the matter of justification by faith. This is the only way anyone can be justified, whether Jew or Gentile. In justification there is no distinction between the two. That alone can be deduced from this passage and no more" (*Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 712.). One might add that not only does Paul state, "I am an Israelite" (Rom. 11:1) and "I am a Jew" (Acts 21:39; 22:3) all in the present tense (ἐγώ εἰμι), but also that the distinction between male and female seems to have remained quite intact to this very day. Horner, *Future Israel*, p. 278, uses the phrase "racial diversity within spiritual unity" with reference to Gal. 3:28.

21 Paul also states in Rom. 15:27 that "the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings." Thus the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant flow both to believing Jews and believing Gentiles: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29; my translation).

However, it can be said here that the "grafting" image depicted in the olive-tree metaphor does picture the situation between believing Gentiles and Israel quite well. To call the sharing of Israel's spiritual blessings a "grafting" into Israel in Paul's metaphor shows the *source* of those blessings, namely, the patriarchs of Israel. In the olive tree analogy, then, the Gentiles are viewed as grafted into the olive tree in order to receive the flow of Israel's spiritual blessings of salvation during the interadvent period from the olive tree root--the patriarchs with whom the Abrahamic covenant was made: "You...were grafted in among them [the natural branches remaining on the olive tree] and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree" (verse 17).²²

Israel's Restoration

What lies in the future for Israel? Because of unbelief, the bulk of that nation has been cut off from the their olive tree and the root that supplies blessing and salvation. But that is not the end of the story.

22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For

22 Culver, *Systematic Theology*, p. 865, has an instructive note about Paul's evangelization of the Gentiles. Regarding Rom. 15:8-14 he states that "this passage, perhaps the most complete systematic biblical argument for world evangelism, hinges on the Old Testament kingdom promises voiced in the whole *TENAK*... 'Christ,' he says, 'became a servant to the circumcised [the nation of Israel only] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs [Abraham onward].' Then he carries a statement of a more ultimate purpose, a world-wide offer of divine mercy to Gentiles as well, adding, 'and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.' He clinches the point by quoting first from the *Kethuvim*, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles' (Ps. 18:49); then from the *Torah*, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people' (Deut. 32:43); and lastly from the *Nevi'im*, 'The root of Jesse will come [house of David], even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope' (Isa. 11:10). These comments apply equally to Matthew 10:5-7; John 10:16; and Romans 9:4, 5. See also Isaiah 56:3-8 and many other Old Testament predictions elaborating the 'promise to the patriarchs that in Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:3)" (brackets original).

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

25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”

27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.²³

In verse 23 Paul argues that God is able to graft the natural branches back into their own olive tree, and in verse 24 he emphasizes how easy it would be to do this, due to the fact that the broken-off branches are "natural" branches of the cultivated olive tree--it is their tree! Then in verses 25-26 he shows that the engrafting of the natural branches will in fact occur.²⁴ The "fall" of Israel was not only *partial*, since God preserved a remnant, but it is also *temporary*, since God will restore the natural branches that were broken off and graft them back into their own olive tree.

It must not be forgotten that the leading interest of the apostle in verse 25 is the removal of the hardness of Israel and their conversion as a whole. This is the theme of verses 11-32. It is stated expressly in verse 12, is reiterated in different terms in verse 15, and is resumed again in verse 25. In verses 17-22 Paul found it necessary to warn Gentiles against vain boasting. But he returns to

23 Rom. 11:22-29.

24 See also vv. 30-31.

the theme of Israel's restoration at verse 23, pleads considerations why Israel could be grafted in again in verses 23, 24, and in verse 25 appeals to divine revelation in final confirmation of the certainty of this sequel. This prepares us for the interpretation of verse 26.²⁵

As with all analogies drawn by the biblical writers, it is important not to press the olive tree analogy too far. Despite the fact that "branches" *could* play the role of such a symbol if that had been Paul's intent, the natural and wild branches do not, in fact, represent specific individuals (as if each branch had a name written on it)²⁶ or even specific generations. The analogy is simpler and more general in its meaning.

Since the natural branches represent national Israel, breaking off most of these branches pictures the bulk of the nation in unbelief and not currently receiving the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant that flow to the nation, a path chosen by rejecting the Messiah at his first advent. Similarly, grafting in wild branches pictures sending salvation to the Gentiles because it connects those wild branches to the blessings of salvation coming from the root. In this resulting condition--with most of its natural branches torn off and wild branches grafted in--the olive tree has stood since Apostolic times throughout the centuries.

During those centuries individual Jews have come to a belief in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and have thus become part of the remnant in verse 5. Likewise, more and more Gentiles have become saved. But since the branches do not represent individuals, an increasing number of natural and wild branches on the tree is not part of the metaphor. Depicting more and more believers through the centuries was simply not part of the analogy designed by Paul.

But at some point in the future, the condition of the olive tree does change. Grafting the natural branches back into their own olive tree pictures God restoring the mass of the nation of Israel to belief. Again, however, specific individuals are not in view.

25 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:96.

26 The processes of breaking branches off and grafting branches back in, therefore, are unrelated to individual salvation or the loss thereof.

This restoration will occur when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (verse 25). This is a difficult expression,²⁷ but the prophets indicate Israel as a whole will accept her Messiah at his second advent.²⁸ The bulk of Israel is then to be grafted back into their own olive tree, and thus²⁹ "all Israel will be saved" (verse 26). Murray states,

It should be apparent from both the proximate and

27 Verse 25 states that the partial and temporary blindness/hardness will obtain "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." For a grammatical analysis of ἀχρις ου το πληρωμα των εθνων εισελθη, see Bruce Corley, "The Jews, the Future, and God (Romans 9-11)," *Southwestern Theological Journal* 19, no. 1, (1976):52. He concludes: "The condition [of Israel] will remain until a crucial event in salvation history has transpired." Perhaps this "crucial event in salvation history," this "fullness of the Gentiles" (πληρωμα των εθνων) in v. 25, is related to the gospel being preached to "all nations" just prior to the second advent as per Matt. 24:14. According to Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, II:435, "In order to understand το πληρ. τ. εθν. ["the fullness of the Gentiles/nations"], we must bear in mind the character of the Apostle's present argument. He is dealing with *nations*: with the Gentile nations, and the Jewish nation...The πληρωμα των εθνων I would regard then as signifying 'the full number,' 'the totality,' of the nations, i.e. every nation under heaven, the prophetic subjects (Matt. xxiv. 14) of the preaching of the gospel" (emphasis original). Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 215, is a bit more precise and probably also more accurate: he states that the expression means "the full number of Gentiles who are to be saved in this age."

28 Zech. 12:10. Harold W. Hoehner, "Israel in Romans 9-11," in *Israel: The Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), p. 156, makes this comment: "That time of salvation for Israel is often depicted by the Old Testament prophets as the messianic age. Hence, the promise that 'all Israel will be saved' will be fulfilled at the commencement of the age to come, the age which was future to Paul's day and is also future to our time. More specifically, this time of forgiveness is mentioned in Zechariah 12:10 as a time when Israel will look on Him whom they pierced and will mourn for Him. At this time there will be the outpouring of the Spirit of grace and of supplication on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This great deliverance of Israel will occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth." On the other hand, Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 782, also citing Zech. 12:10, believes that the cleansing of Israel immediately precedes the second advent. In support of the first view, the outpouring of the Spirit of grace certainly would seem to entail the salvation of Israel, and Zech. 12:10 appears to place this outpouring at the time they can look on him whom they have pierced and mourn for him, which implies the second advent (cf. Matt. 24:30). However, the slight difference between these two views is not material to the issues discussed here. This book takes the simultaneity of these two events as its

less proximate contexts in this portion of the epistle that it is exegetically impossible to give to "Israel" in this verse [verse 26] any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter. There is a sustained contrast between Israel and the Gentiles...It is of ethnic Israel Paul is speaking and Israel could not possibly include the Gentiles....

Verse 26 is in close sequence with verse 25. The main thesis of verse 25 is that the hardening of Israel is to terminate and that Israel is to be restored. This is but another way of affirming what had been called Israel's "fullness" in verse 12, the "receiving" in verse 15, and the grafting in again in verses 23, 24. To regard the climactic statement, "all Israel shall be saved", as having reference to anything else than this precise datum would be exegetical violence.

If we keep in mind the theme of this chapter and the sustained emphasis on the restoration of Israel, there is no other alternative than to conclude that the proposition, "all Israel shall be saved", is to be interpreted in terms of the fullness, receiving, the ingrafting of Israel as a people, the restoration of Israel to gospel favour and blessing and the correlative turning of Israel from unbelief to faith and repentance. When the preceding verses are related to verse 26, the salvation of Israel must be conceived of on a scale that is commensurate

working hypothesis.

- 29 In the clause, "and so all Israel will be saved," the word "so" is a translation of the Greek οὕτως. The word cannot be translated "then": "and then all Israel will be saved." Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:96, writes that "it means 'and accordingly', continuing the thought of what precedes or drawing out its implications." Harold W. Hoehner, "Israel in Romans 9-11," pp. 154-155, discusses the grammatical options and then concludes as follows: "It would seem best to consider that it [οὕτως] introduces a logical consequence or inference, that is, the logical consequence of Israel's hardening until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in so that all Israel will be saved. This is the normal usage of οὕτως as seen in Romans 5:12. Although οὕτως is not temporal in meaning, it is temporally conditioned because the salvation of all Israel occurs after Israel's hardening and the entrance of the fullness of the Gentiles mentioned in verse 25. The temporal aspect is reinforced by the change of tenses from the perfect and aorist in verse 25 to the future in verse 26. So the logical consequence will occur in the future."

with their trespass, their loss, their casting away, their breaking off, and their hardening, commensurate, of course, in the opposite direction. This is plainly the implication of the contrasts intimated in fullness, receiving, grafting in, and salvation. In a word, it is the salvation of the mass of Israel that the apostle affirms.³⁰

Murray is correct: there is no exegetical alternative. "All Israel will be saved" corresponds to "their fullness" in verse 12 and "their acceptance" in verse 15 and therefore must again be interpreted ethnically and nationally.³¹ It means that the nation of Israel as a whole will return to belief.³²

Paul goes on to make a remarkable statement in verses 28-29. While the nation of Israel is now predominantly in

30 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:96-98.

31 There is, of course, no shortage of theologians holding to replacement theology who deny this conclusion. However, the champions of this theology are not united in the alternative proposed. According to William Hendriksen, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 49, "all Israel" refers to "the full number of elect Jews whom it pleases God to bring into the kingdom throughout the ages until the very day when also the full number of the Gentiles shall have been brought in." He does not see v. 26 as predicting "a still-future mass-conversion" (emphasis original) of the nation. However, he at least sees "all Israel" as a reference to Jews to the exclusion of Gentiles (p. 43). On the other hand, O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), p. 187, argues "that 'all Israel' consists not of all elect Jews, but of all the elect of God, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin." But as Murray--who himself is hardly a dispensationalist!--concludes, all this is "exegetical violence." One wonders at the motive.

32 It does not refer to the personal salvation of all Israelites in history or even all those alive at the second advent. "It may not be interpreted as implying that in the time of fulfillment every Israelite will be converted. Analogy is against any such insistence. The apostasy of Israel, their trespass, loss, casting away, hardening were not universal. There was always a remnant, not all branches were broken off, their hardening was in part. Likewise restoration and salvation need not include every Israelite. 'All Israel' can refer to the mass, the people as a whole in accord with the pattern followed in the chapter throughout" (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:98). Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 539, agrees: "This...does not mean that every last Israelite will be saved but the people as a whole." He repeats the same statement on p. 562. Corley, "The Jews, the Future, and God (Romans 9-11)," p. 54, calls this interpretation of "all Israel" a "collective sense," as in 2 Chron. 12:1. 1 Sam. 12:1 and Dan. 9:11 might also be examples.

unbelief, they are "enemies,"³³ but due to their national "election" as God's covenant people,³⁴ "they are [still] beloved for the sake of the fathers;³⁵ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."³⁶

"Beloved" thus means that God has not suspended or rescinded his relation to Israel as his chosen people in terms of the covenants made with the fathers. Unfaithful as Israel have been and broken off for that reason, yet God still sustains his peculiar relation of love to them, a relation that will be demonstrated and vindicated in the restoration (vss. 12, 15, 26).³⁷

A study of "the remnant" in the Old Testament shows this pattern very clearly. Based on a review of the Old Testament data, Barry Horner concludes that

in the present, according to Rom 11:5, a remnant, a relatively small number of Jewish Christians, contrasts with the larger part of unbelieving Israel that remains dispersed throughout the world. But the question that must now be asked concerns God's attitude toward the nation of Israel as a whole...The answer that becomes so clear [from the OT] is that while God did sharply distinguish between carnal and spiritual characteristics, He nevertheless regarded even the carnal constituency

33 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:101: "This is not to be understood subjectively of the enmity entertained by Jews toward Gentiles or by Gentiles toward Jews. It refers to the alienation from God's favour and blessing."

34 National or theocratic election refers to God's choice of Israel as a nation and must be distinguished from his election of individuals to salvation. Although the same Greek word, εκλογη, is used in both verses 5 and 28, verse 5 refers to the latter and verse 28 to the former. Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:101.

35 The μεν-δε construction implies that these two conditions are simultaneous, not "enemies" now and "loved" later.

36 According to Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1873), p. 280, "call" is equivalent to Israel's "election" in v. 28. The "gifts," according to Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:101, have reference to those items listed in 9:4-5: "...who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh."

37 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:101. Horner, *Future Israel*, p. 294, describes the parallel this way: "...unbelieving Jews are passively 'enemies' of God, in parallel with passively being 'beloved' of God."

as retaining national status.

...God's dealing with the nation of Israel is not merely with Israel after the Spirit, with the remainder having no identity in the sight of God. Israel after the flesh was still the recipient of God's covenantal interest. Granted it was of this world, so to speak. But this in no way nullifies the fact that God in human history had a covenantal interest in the earthly nation of Israel in total, both spiritual and carnal. We are repeatedly told that God's persistence with national Israel, from the very beginning of its redemption, is for the sake of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So we would conclude that it ought not to surprise us that in this present age, while there is a "[Jewish Christian] remnant according to grace" (Rom 11:5), this language of necessity demands that there is an unbelieving national Israel that still has God's offended yet loving and steadfast covenantal interest, "for the sake of the fathers" (Rom 11:28).³⁸

So the unbelieving bulk of national Israel remains "beloved" by God, who still maintains a covenantal interest in the "elect nation" or "elect people" as a whole. Clearly, then, even though most of the nation is in unbelief, that unbelieving majority is still considered by God part of national Israel, "His people whom He foreknew" (verses 1-2). This confirms that even during the interadvent period, national Israel in its entirety remains the people of God.

Both metaphors in verse 16 support this conclusion. As the firstfruits are holy, so the entire lump is holy; as the root is holy, so all the branches are holy. The first part of both metaphors represents the patriarchs, and the second part the nation of Israel. With regard to the olive-tree metaphor, all the natural branches together constitute natural Israel as a whole. Therefore, all those natural branches are holy or consecrated by the holy root (the patriarchs). Since Paul knew what he was going to write in verse 17 when he wrote verse 16, it cannot be concluded that the broken-off natural branches in verse 17 lose their status as holy and as members of national Israel, the elect or chosen people of God "whom He

38 Horner, *Future Israel*, pp. 299, 301-302; brackets original.

foreknew." The metaphorical process of cutting off cannot be pressed to imply such a loss of status.

But a question naturally arises. It was stated in the previous section, and argued in detail in Appendix 2, that Paul does not give the olive tree independent meaning separate and distinct from the natural branches. So just as all of these branches represent national Israel, so does the olive tree. In terms of the metaphor then, how can the broken-off natural branches still be part of national Israel when they are not part of the olive tree?

There are indications as Paul continues to develop the metaphor that *all* the natural branches "belong" to the olive tree, whether on or off. Though cut off from the olive tree:

- These branches remain "natural branches" (verse 21)
- It is "their own olive tree" into which these natural branches are again grafted (verse 24)

According to the "breaking-off" imagery of the metaphor, the natural branches in one sense are not "part" of the olive tree per se. However, the olive tree per se does not have the primary symbolic significance; only the total of the natural branches has such significance, and they, in their entirety, represent the nation of Israel. So, then, even though the broken-off branches are lying there, as it were, on the ground, they must still "belong" to the olive tree. The overall interpretation of the metaphor must be controlled by the branches.³⁹

What, then, does the breaking-off process in the metaphor signify? Covenant blessings still, and always will, belong to Israel as the covenant nation of God. Therefore:

- In the metaphor, the breaking-off process signifies

39 Even though the natural branches that have been broken off are not part of the believing "remnant" of Israel that remain attached to the olive tree, it would not be correct to make the olive tree represent "the remnant" that God always preserves among his covenant people, Israel. The olive tree still remains "their own olive tree" (v. 24), referring to the broken-off branches. For the same reason, the olive tree should not be described by the terms "spiritual Israel" or "true Israel."

simply that these branches in that cut-off condition, while still belonging to the olive tree, do not currently receive the blessings that still flow to the olive tree from the root.

- Without the symbolism, this is what is taking place: the unbelieving bulk of the nation of Israel, while still belonging to that nation, does not currently receive the covenantal blessings that continue to flow **to the nation as the covenant nation** from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; only the remnant within the nation receives them.

The reverse can be explained as follows.

- In the metaphor, grafting these broken-off branches back into their own olive tree enables them again to receive the blessings that flow to the olive tree from the root.
- Without the symbolism, the formerly unbelieving bulk of the nation of Israel now begins again to receive the covenantal blessings that never stopped flowing **to the nation as the covenant nation** from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Indeed, the olive tree imagery chosen by Paul gives him the ability to represent some rather complicated relationships. Here is a summary:

- Covenantal blessings are still flowing to the nation of Israel.
- Some within that nation, represented by the natural branches cut off from the olive tree, are not currently receiving these blessings.
- Others within that nation, represented by the natural branches still "on" the olive tree (the current remnant), are receiving these blessings.
- Believing Gentiles, the wild branches grafted into the olive tree, are also receiving these blessings.

The overall metaphor, then, gives two distinct pictures of "Israel" at two different times: first, the time between the two advents, and second, at the second advent:

Israel	Condition of the Olive Tree
<p>The unbelieving segment within national Israel receives none of the nation's covenantal blessings, though still belonging to the nation</p> <p>The believing remnant within national Israel receives the nation's covenantal spiritual blessings</p>	<p>Most of the natural branches are cut off of the olive tree and receive no nourishment from the root, though still belonging to the olive tree</p> <p>Some of the natural branches remain on the olive tree and receive nourishment from the root</p>
<p>"All" of national Israel is in belief and receive all of the nation's covenantal blessings, both spiritual and physical</p>	<p>The cut-off natural branches, still belonging to the olive tree, are grafted back into "their own olive tree" so that now all the natural branches receive nourishment from the root</p>

The issues with which Paul is dealing in Romans 9-11 are complicated. In 11:1 Paul categorically states that God has not rejected the nation of Israel. However, the relationships between--and the current covenantal status of--the believing remnant, the unbelieving segment, and the nation of Israel as a whole are difficult to describe. Paul himself recognized the nuances, as indicated by his curious and obscure statement in Romans 9:6: "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."⁴⁰ After making this

⁴⁰ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 138, is concise and correct when he writes that this statement "simply distinguishes the nation as a whole from the believing element within the nation." Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 728, takes the same view: "The first expression, [they are not] all Israel, refers to the believing Jewish remnant, the believing natural seed. The second expression, of Israel, refers to the entire nation, the

statement, he probably recognized the need for considerably more explanation and for a helpful illustration. Enter the olive tree. The olive tree is Paul's method of explanation, but it should not be surprising that it too requires detailed study to be understood.

One additional question remains: when the broken-off natural branches are grafted back into their own olive tree, what are the full covenantal blessings that will flow to national Israel at the second advent? The blessings promised in the Abrahamic covenant are both spiritual and physical,⁴¹ and they are further developed by subsequent covenants and the prophets. In his discussion of "all Israel will be saved" (verse 26), Murray unfortunately stops short of affirming Israel's restoration to the land, the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and the reign of Messiah from Jerusalem on the throne of David, all primarily physical blessings. However, in verse 29 Paul indeed affirms that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." Walter Kaiser makes the following observations:

"And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26) in accordance with the predictions of Isaiah 27:9 and 59:20-21 [cited in verses 26-27]. The "and so" (καὶ οὕτως) probably points back to verse 25 and the "mystery" of the temporary failure of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes in (cf. Luke 21:24). Then, in that future moment, "all Israel will be saved" (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται). This is not a matter of individual salvation nor a matter of

whole natural seed" (emphasis original). He calls the believing remnant "spiritual Israel," which is an acceptable term in this context and probably close to what Paul had in mind by the first use of "Israel" in 9:6. However, in chapter 11 "Israel" always refers to the whole nation, or to use Fruchtenbaum's term, "the whole natural seed." In the olive-tree metaphor, the total of the natural branches also constitute the entire nation; those that are cut off are the unbelieving segment, and those that remain on the olive are the remnant or "the believing natural seed."

41 Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 575: "It should be noted at this point that the Abrahamic Covenant contained both physical and spiritual promises. While the physical promises were limited to Israel, the spiritual promises or blessings were to extend to the Gentiles. The promise of Gentile blessing was stated early in the Abrahamic Covenant (12:3)." One of the most important physical blessings or promises was the land of Canaan given to Israel "for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8; see also 12:7; 13:14-15; 15:17-21).

converting to a Gentile brand of Christendom, but it is a matter of God's activity in history when the nation shall once again, as in the days of blessing in the past, experience the blessing and joy of God spiritually, materially, geographically, and politically.⁴²

It is not Israel's fall that is "irrevocable" but all of God's covenants and covenantal promises to her!⁴³ The physical and spiritual blessings promised in those covenants and by the prophets can be summarized as follows. At the second advent, Jesus--King Messiah, the Messiah of Israel--will:

- Regather all of Israel back to the land God promised them as an everlasting possession: Isaiah 11:10-12; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Micah 2:12-13; Zechariah 8:1-8; 10:8-12.
- Accomplish Israel's spiritual redemption based on his atoning work at his first coming: Zechariah 12:10-13:1. This is the specific prophecy fulfilled when the natural branches are grafted back into their own olive tree.
- Reestablish the kingdom of Israel and rule the world from Jerusalem on the throne of David: Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:3-8; 30:8-9; 33:14-16; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-12.
- Establish the universal knowledge of God in both Israel and the nations: Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:9; Jeremiah 3:16-18; 31:31-34; Zephaniah 2:11; Zechariah 8:20-23; 14:16.
- Bring in worldwide peace: Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4.

Since "the gifts and the calling [election] of God are irrevocable," ethnic, national Israel as a whole must receive these promised blessings at the second advent of

42 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (October-December, 1981):310.

43 Rom. 9:4-5. "That these [gifts and calling] 'are not repented of' is expressly to the effect that the adoption, the covenants, and the promises in their application to Israel have not been abrogated" (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:101).

their Messiah when "all Israel will be saved." Moreover, as a result of Israel's "acceptance" at that time, the derivative blessings that accrue for the world at large will be nothing less than "life from the dead" (verse 15).

Gentile Salvation

A final observation must be made from Paul's discussion of Israel in Romans 11. Israel, both in unbelief and belief, is the source and vehicle for Gentile salvation:

Finally, in the climax to his argument, Paul counters the arrogant boasting of some Gentile Christians by reminding them that it is only through Israel that salvation has come to them and that there awaits a day when God's promise to Israel will come to full realization and "all Israel will be saved" (11:12-36).⁴⁴

Murray writes similarly,

The salvation of the Gentiles is itself of sufficient magnitude to evince the gracious design fulfilled through the trespass of Israel and therefore sufficient to warrant denial of the proposition that Israel stumbled merely for the purpose that they might fall. In the construction of the sentence [in v. 11], however, the salvation of the Gentiles is subordinate to another design. This subordination is not to depreciate the significance of the Gentiles' salvation. To this Paul returns repeatedly later on. But it is striking that this result should here be represented as subserving the saving interests of Israel. It is "to provoke them to jealousy".⁴⁵

Again Murray drives home this point:

The doctrine involved in this argument is the one pervading this passage, that the provisions of God's redemptive grace for Jew and Gentile have their base in the covenant of the fathers of Israel. To use Paul's figure here, the patriarchal root is never

44 Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 240.

45 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:76.

uprooted to give place to another planting and thus it continues to impart its virtue to and impress its character upon the whole organism of redemptive history. The ingrafting of Israel is for this reason the action which of all actions is consonant with the unfolding of God's worldwide purpose of grace....It is the "how much more" [v. 24] of consonance with the basic Israelitish character of the covenant in terms of which salvation comes to the world.⁴⁶

Fruchtenbaum simply and more concisely states that "Gentile salvation is subservient to Jewish salvation."⁴⁷

God's plan of salvation for the world, based on the Abrahamic covenant and the later covenants with Israel that expand it, revolves around Israel in every way. "Salvation is from the Jews," as Jesus himself said.⁴⁸ Salvation comes to the world through Israel and only through Israel. But even more importantly, the ultimate salvation and blessing of Israel itself is the preeminent component of this plan, the capstone and goal of God's plan in the covenants and prophets. The new covenant, with its saving blood of the Messiah,⁴⁹ was made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,"⁵⁰ not with the Gentiles. Salvation flowing to the nations is always derivative and secondary.

Summary of Romans 11

Here is a summary of the points Paul makes in Romans 11; they are important for interpreting the ἐκκλησία in Jesus' statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18.

- God has not rejected his people, the nation of Israel, though the bulk of the nation is currently in unbelief.
- Israel's fall is *partial*; there remains a believing remnant, as was often the case in the Old Testament

46 Ibid., II:90.

47 Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 742.

48 John 4:22.

49 Luke 22:20.

50 Jer. 31:31.

as well.

- Israel's fall is *temporary*: the nation as a whole will yet have a "fulfillment" and "acceptance" at the second advent at which time "all Israel will be saved."
- National Israel's full restoration is based on the fact that God's covenants with her and his election of her "are irrevocable."
- The fact that the patriarchs are holy (consecrated to God) guarantees that the entire nation coming from them is also holy (consecrated to God).
- In the olive-tree metaphor, the root represents the patriarchs themselves, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- The total of the natural branches represents the entirety of ethnic or national Israel between the two advents--the nation of Israel that descended from the patriarchs.
- During this interadvent period, the bulk of the natural branches have been broken off because of unbelief, but not those that represent "the remnant," which continues to receive the spiritual blessings of salvation from the patriarchal root.
- These cut-off natural branches remain part of the nation of Israel, and from the standpoint of God's election of that nation are still loved by him because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."
- The wild branches grafted into the olive tree during this interadvent period represent Gentiles from among the nations of the world who, as a result of this grafting, share in Israel's spiritual blessings of salvation from the patriarchal root.
- At the second advent the broken-off natural branches are again grafted back into their own olive tree, "all Israel will be saved," and all the promises to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament will be fulfilled.

- Therefore, two distinct pictures of the olive tree present two distinct pictures of national Israel: the first with the bulk of its natural branches broken off (the present view of Israel) and the second with the bulk of its natural branches grafted back into their own olive tree (the eschatological view of Israel).
- Salvation comes to the Gentiles through Israel and only through Israel.⁵¹
- The salvation and blessing of Israel itself represent the preeminent component and goal of God's overall plan of blessing and salvation.

51 The salvation of all creation also flows through Israel. See Isa. 65:17-19; cf. Rom. 8:18-23.