

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 11 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

Romans 9 taught that it never was God's purpose to save every individual in the natural nation of Israel (9:6)¹. It has always been God's purpose to save all those whom he elected in a sovereign way, that is, those he predestined to come to faith (9:11)².

Romans 10 explained why Israel as a natural nation failed. The Jews as a whole tried to be saved by their works of the law (by their own righteousness), instead of by faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation (by Christ's righteousness).

Romans 11 teaches that God's eternal purpose with Israel and with the Gentiles will certainly be fully accomplished. The fullness of Israel as well as the fullness of the Gentiles will certainly be saved!

OUTLINE

Theme. God is himself the source, accomplisher and goal of justification (salvation)

God's justification is also for believers within the natural nation of Israel. God's covenant people include the full number of believers coming from the natural nation of Israel in every generation and the full number of believers coming from the natural Gentile nations in every generation.

(I) 11:1-10 God elects some and hardens others

a. Examples of Jews whom God elected (did not reject) (11:1-4)

b. The people who obtained God's righteousness and those who did not (11:5-10).

(II) 11:11-15 God uses Jews for the salvation of Gentiles and he uses Gentiles for the salvation of Jews

a. God used the fall of the natural nation of Israel to bring many Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ (11:11-12)

b. God uses the believers among the Gentile nations to bring many Jews to faith in Jesus Christ (11:13-15)

(III) 11:16-24 Justification is by faith only

a. The holiness of the root (Jesus Christ) determines the holiness of the tree (God's people) (11:16)

b. Jewish and Gentile believers are grafted into God's people by faith only (11:17-24)

(IV) 11:25-32 The mystery is how God works out his plan of salvation in history

a. The mystery is not 'when', but 'how' God reaches the full number of God's saved people (11:25a).

b. The mystery *is that* the believing Gentiles are equally heirs with the believing Jews.

c. Israel experienced, not a temporary hardening, but a partial hardening (11:25b-26a)

d. The fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of Israel (11:12,25b-26a).

e. The Saviour already came out of Zion at his first coming (11:26b-27)

He will not come (from heaven) to Zion at his second coming.

f. The chosen Jews are enemies and loved ones at the same time (11:28).

g. God's gifts and calling with respect to his chosen people remain irrevocable (11:29).

h. God uses the elect Jews and the elect Gentiles for one another's salvation (11:30-31).

i. God first binds all his chosen people (Gentiles and Jews) over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on all his chosen people (Gentiles and Jews)(11:32).

(V) 11:33-36 God's plan of salvation is unfathomable.

a. God's wisdom, knowledge, judgements and ways.

b. Paul reveals the marvellous plan of God by which he saves Gentiles through Jews and Jews through Gentiles, resulting in the one worldwide Church.

EXPLANATION

(I) 11:1-10 God elects some and hardens others

a. Examples of Jews whom God elected (did not reject) (11:1-4)

11:1. I ask then: Did God reject (push away)³ (viad) his people⁴? By no means! I am (vipa) an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

11:2. God did not reject (viad) his people, whom he foreknew (know in advance)⁵ (viaa). Don't you know⁶ (viaa) what the Scripture says (vipa) in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed⁷ (vipa) to God against Israel:

11:3. "Lord, they have killed (viaa) your prophets and torn down⁸ (viaa) your altars; I am the only one left (leave as a remainder)⁹ (viap), and they are (seeking)(to kill) (vipa) my soul?"

¹ cf. Deuteronomy 7:6-10

² cf. Acts 13:48; 2 Timothy 1:9-10

³ G: apótheó

⁴ G: to laos autou

⁵ G: proginóskó.

⁶ G: oida

⁷ G: entugchanó

⁸ G: kataskaptó

⁹ G: hupoleipó

11:4. And what was God's answer (divine revelation)¹⁰ to him? "I have reserved¹¹ (kept as a remainder) (viaa) for myself seven thousand who have not bowed¹² (viaa) the knee to Baal.

The present picture of the nation of Israel was disturbing to Jewish believers. Paul is still occupied with the question about the unbelief of the natural nation of Israel.

- In Romans 9:6 he asked whether God's word of promise had failed.
- In Romans 9:14 he asked whether God was unjust.
- In Romans 11:1 he asked whether God had rejected Israel.

The picture of the nation of Israel in the time of Paul was that it was a disobedient and stubborn nation. This led some Gentile believers to conclude that the nation of Israel had been rejected and that the Gentile nations had taken the place of the nation of Israel. However, Paul shows that God had *not rejected* his own people. He had *not terminated* his people and he had *not replaced* his people!

God has not rejected his own people whom he foreknew (11:1-6). Paul says that God has never rejected his own people whom he foreknew. The expression 'his people' can only refer to the whole natural nation of Israel when the expression 'whom he foreknew' refers to Israel's election unto the privileges summarised in Romans 9:4-5, and *not to Israel's election unto salvation*.

Nevertheless, the expression 'his people' *rather refers to the remnant* of people God chose from the natural nation of Israel, because the expression 'whom he foreknew' refers to Israel's election unto salvation (justification) as in Romans 8:29 (cf. 9:6b). 'God's people' in the light of the New Testament revelation *are always genuine believers!*

A prove that God had not rejected his people is that Paul himself was an Israelite that had come to faith. Another proof that God had not rejected his people is that in the past history of Israel, God had always reserved for himself a remnant of people within the natural nation of Israel that had not bowed down to idols.

God's people are foreknown. The meaning of the expression 'known in advance' is the same as 'chosen before the creation'. Romans 8:29 says, "Those God foreknew¹³ (viaa) he also predestined¹⁴ (viaa) to be conformed¹⁵ to the likeness of his Son." The foreknown, predestined people are all genuine believers! And 2 Timothy 2:19 says, "The LORD knows those who are his". Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "He chose¹⁶ (viam) them in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight ... In love he predestined¹⁷ (vpaa) them to be adopted as his sons¹⁸ through Jesus Christ."

Examples of the remnant of Israel during the Old Testament period. *The partial hardening* of Israel and thus *the simultaneous partial election* of Israel takes place throughout the centuries! In every generation there was a remnant of true believers within the natural nation of Israel.

- *During the generation of Jacob* (2007 - 1860 B.C.), God sent Joseph ahead to secure the remnant of his descendants¹⁹.
- *During the generation of Elijah* (874 - 845 B.C.), there were 7000 in Israel who did not bow their knees to Baal (11:1-4)²⁰.
- *During the generation of king Hezekiah* (726-685 B.C.) after the destruction by Sargon of Assyria, only a remnant of Israel and the survivors of Judah would return to the LORD, even though an overwhelming righteous destruction was decreed for the rest of Israel²¹.
- *During the generation of Isaiah* (740-680 B.C.), there were survivors in Israel who did not forsake the LORD²²; there was the prophet Isaiah and his disciples who were children the LORD had given him to be signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty²³; and there were the aliens who bound themselves to the LORD to love and serve him and to hold fast to his covenant²⁴.
- *During the generation of the Exile to Babylon* (586 B.C.), there was the remainder of the house of Israel whom the LORD had uploaded (on his back) and had carried them since their birth and would carry to their old age²⁵.
- *During the generation of Joel* (500 B.C.), there would be deliverance among the survivors whom the LORD calls... and everyone who calls on the name of the LORD would be saved²⁶.

¹⁰ G: ho chrématismos

¹¹ G: kataleipó, katelipon

¹² G: kamptó

¹³ G: progínóskó

¹⁴ G: prohorizó

¹⁵ G: summorfos

¹⁶ G: exelegomai

¹⁷ G: prohorizó

¹⁸ G: huiiothesia

¹⁹ Genesis 45:7

²⁰ 1 Kings 19:18

²¹ Isaiah 6:13; 7:3; Isaiah 10:20-23

²² Isaiah 1:4,9

²³ Isaiah 8:16-18

²⁴ Isaiah 56:6

²⁵ Isaiah 46:3-4

²⁶ Joel 2:32

During the Old Testament period God saw to it that there was always a group of people that belonged to him – ‘a chosen remnant’. The number could have been literally 7000. But in accordance with the Biblical symbolism of numbers, the number 7000 has a deeper significance: it is the full number (the fullness) of believers in the natural nation of Israel whom God had predestined to remain faithful to him during the oppression under king Ahab. There could have been many more believers at that time than literally 7000. What is important is not the literal number of believers, but the fact that all those God had chosen were there! Not a single elected person was lost (8:37-39)²⁷! The fact that someone was chosen or elected by God is his assurance that he is saved and always belongs to God’s people!

During the period of the kings of Israel God did *not* regard or treat the whole natural nation of Israel as ‘his people’ (11:1)²⁸. He regarded and treated the 7000 people who had not bowed their knee to Baal as his chosen people! ‘The remnant’ of believers during the time of king Ahab was a part of the fullness (the full number) of the natural nation of Israel that will be God’s true and spiritual people at the end of the history of the world.

The natural nation of Israel was as Sodom and Gomorrah (9:29)²⁹. Because the natural people of Israel behaved and lived like the heathen, there was for God no difference between them and Sodom and Gomorrah³⁰. Only by God’s undeserved grace the whole of the natural nation of Israel was not destroyed or annihilated as Sodom and Gomorrah. God left her ‘descendants’³¹.

Only a part of the natural nation of Israel was saved³². “Though (the number of) Israel be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant *will return (to the LORD, the Mighty God)*” - only the remnant *will be saved*. ‘The LORD, the Mighty God’ in Isaiah 9:6-7 is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. With regard to the rest of the natural nation of Israel, God’s overwhelming and righteous destruction had been decreed. That is why Paul differentiates between ‘Israel according to the flesh’ (that is, the natural nation of Israel’ (9:6a)³³ and ‘the Israel of God’ (the true or spiritual Israel) (9:6b)³⁴!

b. The people who obtained God’s righteousness and those who did not (11:5-10).

11:5. So too (likewise)³⁵, at the present time (during the generation of Paul) there is a remnant (rest)³⁶ chosen³⁷ (has become and remains an elected group) (vira) by grace.

11:6. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; otherwise³⁸ grace would no longer be grace.

The remnant of Israel during the New Testament revelation. During the Old Testament period there was always a remnant that remained faithful to God. Also during the New Testament period there were many Jews who came to faith in Jesus Christ: “The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of (some) Jews” (1:16). The advantage of Jews was that they were entrusted with the very words of God (3:1-3). God is the God of the (believing) Jews (3:30). Abraham was the father of the circumcised (Jews)(4:12). The righteousness and obedience of Jesus made some Jews righteous (5:18-19; 7:4; 9:6,24,27,29; 10:1,11-13,16). In every period of human history there will be a remnant of believers (9:27) coming from the natural nation of Israel whom God predestined to receive grace, salvation and glory. This shows that God had not rejected his Old Testament people (11:1) and it shows how God would save ‘all Israel’ (11:26). ‘All Israel’ is the full number of Jews God had chosen to be saved. It is clear that God’s grace is able to save people who had previously been disobedient (11:30-32).

A final proof that God had not rejected his people is that in the present history of the natural nation of Israel (that is, in Paul’s time) there is again a remnant (of Jews) chosen by grace. Grace is the antithesis of human performance. If grace is conditioned in any way by human performance or by the (free) will of man to act, then grace ceases to be grace. In Romans 11 not grace unto privileges, but grace unto salvation of Jews (and of Gentiles) is in view (3:24; 4:16; 5:20-21)³⁹, because the elect obtain the righteousness unto eternal life (5:18,21) – they are saved.

The true picture of the true Israel is as follows: In every century of the past history of the natural nation of Israel there was a remnant chosen by grace and never by works (cf. 9:27). And *in every century of the future history of the natural nation of Israel there will be a remnant chosen by grace* and never by works (11:5-6). God will be saving people from the natural nation of Israel until the second coming of Christ (11:26)⁴⁰. He will likewise be saving people from the natural nations of the Gentiles until the second coming of Christ (11:25)⁴¹. Only at the end of history, at the second coming of

²⁷ cf. John 17:6,12; 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6

²⁸ Hosea 1:9

²⁹ Isaiah 1:3-20

³⁰ cf. Genesis 18:20-21; 19:4-5; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:4-50

³¹ H: zera; G: sperma. Romans 9:29

³² Isaiah 10:20-23; Romans 9:27

³³ 1 Corinthians 10:18 in the Greek text says ‘Israel according to the flesh’!

³⁴ Galatians 6:16

³⁵ G: houtós (see Romans 11:26)

³⁶ G: to leimma

³⁷ G: hé eklogé ginomai

³⁸ G: epei

³⁹ Galatians 2:21; Ephesians 2:5,8; 1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:9

⁴⁰ cf. Matthew 24:34

⁴¹ cf. Genesis 22:18; Matthew 24:14

Christ, will the picture of God's salvation plan with regard to his people consisting of the true Israel and the fullness of the Gentiles be complete.

There is as much hope for the people from the nation of Israel to be saved as there is for people from the Gentile nations to be saved! Already during the New Testament period many Jews came to faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1:16; 3:30; 4:12; 5:18-19; 7:4; 9:6,24,27,29; 10:1,11-13,16)⁴².

The remnant chosen by grace obtained God's righteousness. Also in the New Testament period God saw to it that a group of people would belong to him. During the first century A.D. there was also 'a remnant chosen by grace' from the natural nation of Israel who became believers in Christ: the disciples of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul and thousands of other Jews believed in Jesus Christ (the Messiah) and consequently obtained God's righteousness.

God has not chosen every Jew to be his people (11:7-10).

11:7. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly⁴³ (vipa) it did not obtain⁴⁴ (viaa), but the elect did (viaa). The others were hardened⁴⁵ (vipa),

11:8. as it is written (virp): 'God gave⁴⁶ (viaa) them a spirit of stupor⁴⁷; eyes that do not see and ears so that do not hear, to⁴⁸ this very day.'

11:9. And David says (vipa): "May their table become⁴⁹ (vmao) a snare (as a trap)⁵⁰ and a net (as a trap)⁵¹, a stumbling block⁵² and a retribution⁵³ for them.

11:10. May their eyes be darkened⁵⁴ (vmap) so they cannot see, and their backs⁵⁵ be bent down⁵⁶ (under burden, of slaves) forever⁵⁷.

It is however also true that throughout the history of the nation of Israel many Jews had hardened themselves against God and his message. Consequently God had hardened them! "They reaped what they sowed"⁵⁸. People within the natural nation of Israel hardened themselves against God during the days of Moses⁵⁹, during the days of the prophet Isaiah⁶⁰, during the days of Jesus Christ⁶¹, during the days of Stephen⁶² and also during the days of Paul (11:7-8). Romans 11:9-10 emphasises the deserved punishment of those that hardened themselves against God and his message.

The hardening of such people is not easy to understand. On the one hand, God's hardening means that *the sovereign God has withheld his electing grace from them* (9:18). On the other hand, God's hardening means that *the sovereign God punished their continual hardening of themselves* by their unbelief and disobedience with permanent hardening (cf. 1:18,24-28)⁶³. Many Jews had hardened their hearts during the Old Testament period against God's prophets⁶⁴. And many other Jews had hardened their hearts during the New Testament period against Christ and his gospel message⁶⁵. Instead, of being justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel, these Jews sought to earn their own righteousness and justify themselves by trying to keep the law (9:30-33).

Thus, *the antithesis of election is hardening*. The hardening is the sovereign action of God (9:18), but it is at the same time a judicial hardening for unbelief and disobedience. The ground of hardening is people's own sin, but the reason of hardening is that God did not show mercy to them as he did to the elect.

The others did not obtain God's righteousness. All the other Jews, who still tried to obtain God's righteousness by keeping the law, did not obtain God's righteousness or salvation (9:30-33). God *chose* a part of the nation and he did *not choose* the others, but *hardened* them (11:5-10). *Divine hardening always includes human responsibility: God finally hardens those people who continually harden themselves against God. At a certain point God gives them over to slavery or bondage to their own godlessness and wickedness* (1:18-32)⁶⁶.

⁴² Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31,35,42; 14:1; 17:12

⁴³ G: epizéteó

⁴⁴ G: epitugchanó

⁴⁵ G: póroó

⁴⁶ G: didómi

⁴⁷ G: hé katanuxis

⁴⁸ G: heós

⁴⁹ G: gínomai

⁵⁰ G: he pagis

⁵¹ G: he théra

⁵² G: to skandalon

⁵³ G: to antapodoma

⁵⁴ G: skotizó

⁵⁵ G: ho nótos

⁵⁶ G: sungkamptó

⁵⁷ Psalm 69:22-23

⁵⁸ Galatians 6:7-8

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 29:2-4

⁶⁰ Isaiah 6:9-10

⁶¹ Matthew 13:11-15; John 1:11; 5:39-40

⁶² Acts 7:51-53

⁶³ Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:11-15

⁶⁴ Hebrews 3:7-11; Matthew 21:34-36

⁶⁵ Matthew 12:2,7,10,14,24; 13:11-15; Acts 7:51

⁶⁶ Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:10-17

(II) 11:11-15 God uses Jews for the salvation of Gentiles and he uses Gentiles for the salvation of Jews

a. God used the fall of the natural nation of Israel to bring many Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ (11:11-12)

11:11. Again I ask (vipa): Did they (Israel) stumble⁶⁷ (viaa) so as to fall⁶⁸ (vsaa) (beyond recovery)? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to envy⁶⁹.

11:12. But if their transgression (means/is) riches for the world, and their defeat⁷⁰ (means/is) riches for the Gentiles, how much⁷¹ to a greater degree⁷² (rich) (is) their fullness⁷³! (There are no verbs and therefore no warrant to assume a particular tense in verse 12)!

The fall of many Jews led to the salvation of many Gentiles. Because many Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah and the gospel, the believers among the Jews (the apostles of Christ and others like Barnabas) proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles. In this way many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus Christ⁷⁴ (11:11). If by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (57 A.D.) so many Gentiles had come to faith in Jesus Christ – a rich gift to the world of Gentile nations – how many more Gentiles would come to faith in Jesus Christ by the time the full number of Jews would also have come to faith in Jesus Christ?

The fall of Israel did no cause its rejection, termination or destruction. By the first coming of Jesus, the mass of people in the natural nation of Israel had stumbled (9:32-33). Their fall had grave consequences (11:7-10), but it did not cause Israel's final and irrevocable doom (rejection, termination, destruction) (11:11). 'The fall of Israel' led to a rich blessing for the world of Gentile nations in the first century A.D. 'The fullness of Israel' that would come to faith in Jesus Christ throughout the centuries in history until the second coming of Christ would lead to an even richer blessing for the world of Gentile nations (11:12)!

God certainly has a further plan with Israel, called 'the mystery' in Romans 11:25, namely, that the fulness of the Gentiles and the fulness of the Jews would be reached simultaneously at the second coming of Christ.

Refutation of dispensational assumptions.

The arguments of the dispensationalists can only stand:

- when they assume future tenses for absent verbs in Romans 11:12,15
- when they change the original Greek text of Romans 11:25b-26a
- and when they assume a biblical framework of dispensations without any biblical warrant!

The 1st assumption of dispensationalists: verbs in the future tense. Dispensationalists translate Romans 11:12,15 as follows: "If their transgression *resulted in* riches for the world and their defeat riches for the Gentiles (during the present 6th dispensation of the Church), how much greater *will (future tense) their fullness bring* (to the world of Gentiles)(during the future 7th dispensation of the millennial kingdom)?"

Refutation. This assumption causes the translation of Romans 11:12,15 and Romans 11:25-26 to be contradictory, because the full number of saved people from the Gentiles nations (11:25) would terminate any further expansion among the Gentiles after the full number of saved people from the nation of Israel had come in! There simply could be no further salvation of the Gentiles after the fullness of Israel!

The 2nd assumption of dispensationalist: the temporary hardening of Israel. Dispensationalists translate Romans 11:25-26 as follows: "Israel has experienced a *temporary* hardening (throughout the present 6th dispensation) until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And *thereafter/then* (during the future 7th dispensation) all Israel will be saved." These interpreters put Romans 11:25-26 chronologically before Romans 11:12,15 and maintain the following: first (in this present 6th dispensation of mainly the Gentile Church) the fulness/full number of Gentiles will enter into God's Kingdom and thereafter (at the beginning of the 7th dispensation of the millennial kingdom of Israel) the fulness/full number of Jews would enter into God's Kingdom. This would be the so-called 'future restoration of all of Israel'. Then (during the period of the 7th dispensation) as a result of the witnessing of these Jews during the 7th dispensation (allegedly the meaning of Revelation 7:1-8), the great mass of Gentiles would be converted (allegedly the meaning of 'the uncountable great multitude' in Revelation 7:9).

Refutation. The translation of Romans 11:25b-26a: as "a *temporary* hardening" and "*thereafter* all Israel will be saved" is WRONG. The only CORRECT translation of Romans 11:25b-26a is: "a *partial* hardening" and "*in this way* all Israel will be saved"! Romans 11 does not deal with a total rejection, but rather with a partial rejection of the people of Israel

⁶⁷ G: ptaió

⁶⁸ G: piptó

⁶⁹ G: parazéloó

⁷⁰ G: to héttéma

⁷¹ G: posos -é -on How greater, how much more, how many more

⁷² G: mallon

⁷³ G: pléróma

⁷⁴ cf. Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13:45-48

throughout history. (There is also a rejection of Gentiles who continue in unbelief and disobedience)! Consequently, it does not deal with a total acceptance, but rather with a partial acceptance of the people of Israel throughout history. Only the chosen believers in the natural nation of Israel are accepted! The fall of the nation of Israel was not temporary, but partial! But the partial fall of the natural nation of Israel does not mean the final and irrevocable doom of the nation of Israel! 'True Israel' (9:6b) continues to exist as physical Jews that have become believers in Jesus Christ. They will exist up to the second coming of Christ!

The 3rd assumption of dispensationalists: a single delayed future event 'until'. Dispensationalists generally argue that *the event that precedes the word 'until'*⁷⁵ (11:25) can only be understood as *a once-for-all time single event* or a point at which something takes place⁷⁶. Therefore the hardening of Israel does not take place *while* the fullness of the Gentiles is coming in, but takes place *before* the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. What precedes the word 'until' initiates an interim period (the so-called 'gap' between God's dealing with Israel in Old Testament and God's dealing with Israel in the end-time) in which God does not deal with Israel at all, but only with Gentiles! These interpreters say that at a certain point in the future, an incomprehensible great number of Gentiles would enter into the Kingdom of God. This would make Israel envious (11:11) and would lead to the termination of Israel's *temporary* hardening (unbelief and disobedience)(11:25). Israel would be restored to God's favour and this would result in an incomprehensible great number of Jews entering the Kingdom of God (being saved)(11:26). This in turn would have a tremendous effect on the Gentiles, who would be even more enriched. Allegedly even many more Gentiles would be saved (11:12,15)!

Refutation. The event that follows the word 'until' can also refer to the culmination of an event that has taken place throughout a long period before. For example: the day was all the time dawning⁷⁷; Christ was all the time putting his enemies under his feet⁷⁸ and every day is a new 'today' to encourage others⁷⁹. Likewise, *the hardening of Israel is not a single temporary event within human history, but an ongoing event: the hardening of a part of Israel throughout human history (and thus also the acceptance of the other part of Israel throughout human history). This will also be true for the Gentiles throughout human history.*

The hardening is an ongoing event throughout human history until its final fullness or completion has been reached at Christ's second coming (11:25). The preceding context (11:1-10) speaks of a partial hardening and a partial acceptance of Israel at different times during the Old Testament period and a partial hardening and partial acceptance of Israel at different times during the New Testament period. The following context (11:17-24) speaks of the breaking off of unbelieving Jews (and unbelieving Gentiles, i.e. nominal Christians) from the olive tree and the simultaneous grafting in of only believing Jews (and believing Gentiles) into the olive tree throughout the New Testament period. This is an ongoing process until the absolute full number of both Gentiles (verse 25) and of Israel (verse 26) has been reached simultaneously at the end of human history.

The correct translation of Romans 11:25-26 ("in this way" and not: "thereafter") clearly indicates that this ultimate full number of chosen believers from every nation in the world will be reached simultaneously and not one after the other! There is no allusion to a once-for-all future *termination* of the hardening of the natural nation of Israel within human history. There is also no allusion to a once-for-all future *restoration* of the natural nation of Israel within human history. And there is no allusion to a once-for-all future mass conversion of Gentile nations to Christ after the so-called restoration of Israel.

What precedes the word 'until' is *an ongoing present hardening of Israel*. What follows the word 'until' in Matthew 23:39, Luke 21:24, Acts 3:21, Romans 11:25, 1 Corinthians 11:26, 1 Corinthians 15:25 and Revelation 20:3,5 is *every time the second coming of Christ! After the second coming of Christ there will not be a next period of salvation or restoration of all Jews!*

The 4th assumption of dispensationalists: the word 'fulness' means an incomprehensible large number. Some dispensationalists argue that the word 'fulness'⁸⁰ only represents 'an incomprehensible great number of Jews (11:12) or Gentiles' (11:25) and cannot refer to 'the total number'. According to dispensationalists the word 'fulness' is *contrasted* in the context not with 'those who were hardened' within the natural nation of Israel, but with *'the transgression (11:11) and defeat' (11:12) of the whole natural nation of Israel*. The 'fulness of Israel' refers in the context to 'those who are being saved' (11:14)(correct) and to 'the acceptance of Israel' (11:15) into God's favour (correct) and therefore *must refer to 'the future repentance (from transgression) and restoration (to victory and faith), the covenant favour and blessing of God and the (millennium) Kingdom of God' which comprises the whole natural nation of Israel (believers and unbelievers)(incorrect).*

Dispensationalists contrast the transgression and defeat of *Israel as a whole* with the salvation and acceptance of *Israel as a whole* (incorrect, because this statement is *contradicted by the word 'partial' in 11:25!*). They maintain that the total number of the chosen believers of Israel would not provide this contrast (incorrect, because this statement rejects God's sovereign election and is *contradicted by the words 'remnant' in 9:27 and 'survivors' in 9:29 and 'at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace' in 11:5).* They

⁷⁵ G: achri hou

⁷⁶ Acts 7:18; Galatians 3:19

⁷⁷ Acts 27:33

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:25; cf. Luke 10:17-20

⁷⁹ Hebrews 3:13

⁸⁰ G: pléróma

say that Romans 11:12 *envisions a situation when true Israel is no longer 'a saved remnant' of Jews (11:5,7), but 'a saved mass' of Jews (11:12)!*

They conclude that 'all Israel' (11:26) refers to this mass of natural Israel who would be saved in the future so-called restoration of Israel in contrast with the remnant of natural Israel who were saved in the past and the present.

Refutation. The above dispensational interpretation is vulnerable at different points:

- The so-called verbs in future tense. Romans 11:12,15 do not have any verbs, let alone verbs in *the future tense*! On the contrary, *Romans 11:5,14,30,31 even refers to events that are taking place at the present time ('now', during Paul's current ministry)* and cannot be limited to the one future event consisting of the so-called restoration of the natural nation of Israel!
- The context does not speak of Israel as a whole mass. Also the context of Romans 11:11-15 does not speak of the transgression and defeat of Israel as a whole and also not of the salvation and acceptance of Israel as a whole, because *the previous context, Romans 11:1-10, clearly speaks of a remnant that is saved and a rest that is hardened. And the following context, Romans 11:16-24, speaks of branches that are broken off and branches that are grafted back again. The context speaks of God's undeserved kindness (mercy) to believers and his deserved sternness (rejection) towards unbelievers.*
- The word 'fulness' is not used in 'a partial great mass sense, but in an absolute sense. For example:
 - Romans 13:10 refers to love as the absolute fullness of the law and not just as something that fulfils the law to a partially great extent.
 - Galatians 4:4 refers to the absolute 'completion of the Old Testament period of time' (the old order as a time of preparation) and not just to a partial completion of that period. The Old Testament period of ceremonial laws is not going to be continued in the future! The first coming of Jesus Christ terminates the Old Testament (the old order) and inaugurates the New Testament (the new order)⁸¹!
 - Ephesians 1:23 refers to the Church (the Body of Christ) as 'the fullness' or '100% compliment' of Jesus Christ, thus, to the absolute full number of believers⁸², and not just to a partially great number of believers in Christ that make up say a 90% complement of Jesus Christ.
 - Romans 11:12, likewise, refers to the salvation of the absolute sum total of all the remnants of true Israel (9:6b) throughout human history: throughout the Old Testament period and throughout the New Testament period (11:1-7,26) and not to the salvation of a great mass of the natural nation of Israel as one physical unit in the future end-time.
 - The 'fulness' not only contrasts 'the transgression and defeat' of Israel, but also the consequent *partial rejection* of Israel! The 'fulness of Israel' is the absolute sum total of all *the partial acceptances* throughout history of Jewish believers belonging to the natural nation of Israel.

b. God uses the believers among the Gentile nations to bring many Jews to faith in Jesus Christ (11:13-15)

11:13-14. I am talking (viva) to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as⁸³ then⁸⁴ I am the apostle to the Gentiles⁸⁵, I make much of (glorify)⁸⁶ my ministry, that somehow (in some way)⁸⁷ I may arouse to envy⁸⁸ (viva) my flesh (= my own people) and save some of them."

The present ministry of Paul. Already in his present ministry as apostle to the Gentile nations⁸⁹, Paul makes much of his ministry, not only to the Gentiles, but also to the Jews. He desires to provoke the Jews (the natural people of the natural nation of Israel) to envy and to save some of them (11:13-14)⁹⁰. Throughout history, from the first to the second coming of Christ, wherever Jews do not persist in their unbelief, they will be saved (11:23). Paul clearly says that believing Jews from the natural nation of Israel are now (at the present time, during Paul's current ministry receiving God's mercy as a result of God's mercy shown to believing Gentiles from the natural Gentile nations (11:30-31).

11:15. "For if their rejection⁹¹ (the rejection of unbelieving Jews) (is) the reconciliation⁹² of the world (of believing Gentiles), what (is) their acceptance⁹³ (the acceptance of believing Jews) but life from the dead (for these believing Jews)?" (There are no verbs and therefore no verbs in the future tense in verse 15).

The rejection of the Messiah (Christ) by Jews - by many in the natural nation of Israel during the first century A.D. and as a consequence the partial rejection of the natural nation of Israel by God at that time led to 'the reconciliation of

⁸¹ Hebrews 9:8-10

⁸² cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

⁸³ G: eph hoson

⁸⁴ G: men oun

⁸⁵ G: ta ethné

⁸⁶ G: doxazó

⁸⁷ G: ei pós

⁸⁸ G: parazéloó

⁸⁹ Galatians 2:8

⁹⁰ cf. Acts 13:14-46; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

⁹¹ G: he apobolé

⁹² G: he katallagé

⁹³ G: he proslémpsis

(many in) the world': that is, the reconciliation of the world of Gentile nations to God and their reconciliation to believers in Israel.

The disobedience of Jews has again and again led to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles in the world, as Acts 13:44-48, Acts 18:6 and Acts 28:23-28 clearly show. As a consequence many Gentiles in the world became believers in Christ and were also reconciled to the believers in Israel⁹⁴.

The acceptance of the Messiah (Christ) by Jews - by the elect remnant from the natural nation of Israel and as a consequence the acceptance of this remnant (of believing Jews) by God will be like "life from the dead" (for these believing Jews). In God's marvellous providence (sovereign rule and care), the salvation of Gentiles will again and again provoke Jews to envy (11:11,13-14) so that many Jews may also become believers in Christ, be saved (11:31) and become reconciled to God and to believers in the Gentile nations (10:12-13)⁹⁵. When such sin-hardened Jews see the transformation in Gentile believers, they become envious, turn in faith to Jesus Christ and are also marvellously transformed. The prophet Ezekiel⁹⁶, the Lord Jesus⁹⁷ and the apostle Paul⁹⁸ call such a transformation in these former sin-hardened Jews nothing less than "life from the dead"!

The transformation of Jews at the present time. Because Romans 11:12 and 15 contains no verb we have to determine the time of the event from the context. *The context (11:13-14,31) clearly shows that these events are taking place "now, at the present time", and that Jews are coming to faith in Jesus Christ at the present time and are thus growing towards their full number at the present time (11:15).* Paul is thus not referring to a future mass conversion of Jews and also not to a future mass conversion of the Gentiles due to this future mass conversion of the Jews. He is referring to the present transformation of Jewish believers themselves due to their conversion to Jesus Christ.

The progressive salvation of more and more Jews leads to the progressive salvation of more and more Gentiles. However, the principle remains true: the progressive salvation of more and more Jews until the full number of Jews throughout the centuries has been reached will among other blessings progressively cause even greater numbers of Gentiles to be saved! And the progressive salvation of more and more Gentiles until the full number of Gentiles throughout the centuries has been reached will among other blessings progressively cause even greater numbers of Jews to be saved!

The marvellous salvation plan of God is that Gentiles are not saved without believing Jews and Jews are not saved without believing Gentiles! Thus, the rejection by God of many unbelieving Jews from the natural nation of Israel led to the acceptance by God of many believing Gentiles from the natural nations in the world. Gentiles were not saved without believing Jews⁹⁹! And the acceptance by God of many believing Gentiles led to the acceptance by God of many believing Jews¹⁰⁰. Also Jews are not saved without believing Gentiles! This is the amazing paradox: Jews are being saved, because they first fell. People must realise how lost they are before they begin to long for salvation!

(III) 11:16-24. Justification is by faith only.

In these verses, Paul directs his argument especially against the Gentile Christians (11:13), so that they will not misunderstand God's salvation plan concerning the Jews (Israel). God has made his covenant with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob is the first 'Israel'¹⁰¹. God confirmed his covenant with Jacob, namely, that "he would be their God" and that "they and their descendants would be his people forever"¹⁰².

But God also said of the unbelievers and disobedient people in the natural nation of Israel, "I am NOT your God and you are NOT my people"¹⁰³! The partial hardening of 'the natural nation of Israel' (cf. 9:6a) throughout the centuries did not frustrate God's covenant with 'the Israel of God', that is, with the believing patriarchs and all believers within the natural nation of Israel (cf. 9:6b).

a. The holiness of the root (Jesus Christ) determines the holiness of the tree (God's people) (11:16)

11:16. "If the (part of the dough offered as) first fruits¹⁰⁴ is holy, (so) also¹⁰⁵ (is) the entire batch¹⁰⁶; and if the root¹⁰⁷ (is) holy, (so) also (are) the branches¹⁰⁸".

The (part of the dough offered as) first fruit relates to the batch (of dough) as the root of a tree relates to the branches. Both pictures explain the same truth, namely, the holiness (and righteousness) of the representative (the first fruit or the

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹⁵ Ephesians 2:11-22

⁹⁶ Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:14

⁹⁷ Luke 15:24,32

⁹⁸ Ephesians 2:1,5; 5:14

⁹⁹ Acts 10:24-48; Acts 11:19-24; Acts 13:46-48

¹⁰⁰ See Acts 21:18-20

¹⁰¹ Genesis 32:28

¹⁰² Genesis 17:7; Leviticus 26:12

¹⁰³ Hosea 1:9

¹⁰⁴ G: he aparché

¹⁰⁵ G: kai

¹⁰⁶ G: to furama. That which is mixed (furaó) or kneaded = a lump or batch of dough

¹⁰⁷ G: hé riza

¹⁰⁸ G: ho klados

root)(Jesus Christ) makes everyone that is bound to him (the batch or the branches)(the Church) holy (and righteous)(cf. 5:17-19).

The Israelites worked the first fruits of their grain harvest into a batch of dough. From this batch of dough they prepared a cake and offered it to the Lord¹⁰⁹. Thereby they consecrated (dedicated) their entire grain harvest to the Lord. 'Holy' means 'set apart from ordinary use and devoted for (dedicated to) sacred use'. By setting aside their first fruits and dedicating it to the Lord, the Israelites regarded their whole harvest as set apart to the Lord, that is, as a gracious gift received out of his hand.

Likewise, all the branches connected to the root of a tree share in the life of the tree. If the root of the tree is holy, so are the branches connected to it. 'The root' of the olive tree may be a picture of the believing patriarchs, with whom God made his covenant (11:28), but in final analysis the root is a picture only of Jesus Christ. 'The tree' is a picture of the people of God or Church in the Old Testament¹¹⁰ and the New Testament¹¹¹.

Jesus Christ is "the Root of David¹¹² and the Offspring of David", that is, the Ground of God's covenant and the One in whom God's covenant is fulfilled¹¹³. Jesus Christ is 'the Seed' of the patriarchs in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed¹¹⁴. He is the Guarantee of this covenant¹¹⁵. He is *the* Mediator of this covenant¹¹⁶. Jesus Christ is never uprooted to give place to another planting, to another (false) prophet or another (false) messiah¹¹⁷! The Root, Jesus Christ, continues to impart his virtue and to impress his character upon the whole tree. 'The tree' represents the Church consisting of believing Jews and believing Gentiles! Thus, both the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, they partake together of the privileges that stems from the same root, Jesus Christ (11:17)¹¹⁸.

b. Jewish and Gentile believers are grafted into God's people by faith only (11:17-24)

11:17. "If some of the branches (unbelieving Jews) have been broken off¹¹⁹ (viap), and you (a believing Gentile), though being (vppa) a wild olive shoot¹²⁰, have been grafted in¹²¹ (viap) among the others and having become (viad) a participant (partner, co-sharer)¹²² in the nourishing sap (fatness)¹²³ of the olive root.¹²⁴"

The cultivated olive tree, which is a very productive tree, is a picture of God's Old Testament people¹²⁵ and God's New Testament people (11:24), all chosen believers. Thus, God's Old Testament people (Israel) are *not terminated or replaced* by God's New Testament people, but are *continued and enlarged* to include the believers from the Gentile nations! Note Ephesians 3:2-6, "The mystery, not made known to men in other generations, but now revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets, is that through the gospel *the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one Body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*"

The wild olive tree, which is one of the most worthless of trees, is a picture of the natural Gentile nations¹²⁶. The branches of the wild olive tree, which are grafted into the cultivated olive root (11:17), represent the believers in Jesus Christ that come from the Gentile nations. Only through faith do they become a part of the cultivated olive tree, which represents God's covenant people. *Thus, the Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ have exactly the same status and value in God's eyes as the Jews who believe in Jesus Christ*¹²⁷.

God's covenant people consists of:

- *one flock* (John 10:16) / (one Church) with one Shepherd (Jesus Christ) that comes from at least two different sheep pens: the sheep pen of the nation of Israel and the different sheep pens of the Gentile nations¹²⁸.
- *one vine* (Jesus Christ) with its branches (the believers)(John 15:1-6)¹²⁹.
- *one olive tree* (Jeremiah 11:16-17; +Romans 11:17-24) with its branches
- *one Body* (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 3:6) or Church with its members. The Head represents Jesus Christ and the members represent Jews and Gentiles that have been baptised by the Spirit into the Body¹³⁰.

¹⁰⁹ Numbers 15:17-21

¹¹⁰ Psalm 22:22. "I will declare your Name ... in the congregation (G: ekklésia)".

¹¹¹ Matthew 16:18. "On this rock I will my Church (G: ekklésia)".

¹¹² Revelation 5:5; 22:16

¹¹³ 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

¹¹⁴ Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16

¹¹⁵ Hebrews 7:22

¹¹⁶ Hebrews 8:6

¹¹⁷ Acts 4:12

¹¹⁸ Ephesians 1:3. Every spiritual blessing comes from Christ.

¹¹⁹ G: ekklaó

¹²⁰ G: agrielaíos

¹²¹ G: egkentrizó

¹²² G: sugkoinónos

¹²³ G: piotétos

¹²⁴ G: hé riza

¹²⁵ Jeremiah 11:16-17; Hosea 14:6

¹²⁶ cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

¹²⁷ cf. Matthew 8:11; 21:43b

¹²⁸ John 10:16; 12:32

¹²⁹ cf. Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7

¹³⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

- *one family as children of God* (Galatians 3:26-29)
- *one new man* (Ephesians 2:15),
- *one household of God* (Ephesians 2:19)
- *one dwelling of God in the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:22)
- *one spiritual house* (one Church) with one Cornerstone (Jesus Christ) and many living stones (the believers)¹³¹.
- *one chosen and holy people of God* (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- *one New Jerusalem* (Revelation 21:9-14) for Jews (Hebrews 12:22-24) and non-Jews (Galatians 4:21-31).

In the same way Paul teaches in Romans 11 that God's covenant people consists of *one olive tree* (the Church) with one root (Jesus Christ) and many Jewish and Gentile branches (the believers). The branches of the natural olive tree represent the believers in the Messiah (Jesus Christ) within the nation of Israel. The unbelievers within the natural nation of Israel have been broken off and do not belong to the cultivated olive tree (11:19-20)¹³².

The picture in Romans 11 is of a specific generation of Jews that, due to their unbelief, are no longer a part of God's covenant people¹³³ and of another generation of Jews that, due to their faith in Jesus Christ, are being grafted into God's covenant people again¹³⁴. Also Gentiles (nominal Christians) will, due to their unbelief, be cut off from God's covenant people¹³⁵! The picture is *not* of genuine believers being cut off from God's covenant people.

All branches, whether from the cultivated olive tree (the natural Jews) or the wild olive tree (the natural Gentiles) that are connected to the holy root (Jesus Christ) are believers. They have been set apart from the world. They are devoted or dedicated to live their lives for God¹³⁶. They are grafted into Jesus Christ (the Root) and into his covenant people (the olive tree)¹³⁷ only by faith. *They are united together in the root on completely equal terms* (10:12-13)¹³⁸. Jews and Gentiles, who were previously unbelievers, are bound to Jesus Christ by their faith and become a part of God's covenant people¹³⁹.

But Jews and Gentiles, who were born within God's covenant people, but are unbelievers or disobedient, will be cut off from God's covenant people¹⁴⁰. The Bible¹⁴¹ and Romans 11 do not teach that a born-again believer can lose his salvation and consequently be cut off from Jesus Christ. But the Bible¹⁴² and Romans 9 do teach that a nominal believer (a nominal Christian) will be cut off from God's covenant people unless he repents and turns to Christ in faith, that is, unless he is born again by the Spirit of Christ¹⁴³.

During the Old Testament period the covenant people of God consisted mainly of believers from the natural nation of Israel¹⁴⁴, but there were also believers that came from the natural nations of the Gentiles¹⁴⁵. But during the New Testament period the covenant people of God consists of believers from every nation in the world¹⁴⁶. *In the New Testament the covenant people of God are better known as 'the Kingdom of God' or 'the Body of Christ' (the one universal Church).*

Therefore there is no longer any difference between a (believing) Jew and a (believing) Gentile¹⁴⁷! The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of every Jew and every Gentile who believes in Jesus Christ¹⁴⁸!

The arrogance of some Gentile believers is condemned.

11:18. "Do not boast¹⁴⁹ (vipn) over those branches (the Jews who were cut off because they continued in unbelief and disobedience). If you (Gentile believers) do, consider this: You do not support (carry, bear)¹⁵⁰ (vipa) the root, but the root (supports) you.¹⁵¹

11:19. You will say¹⁵² (vifa) then, 'Branches were broken off¹⁵³ so that I could be grafted in¹⁵⁴.

¹³¹ 1 Peter 2:4-8; cf. 2:9-10

¹³² cf. Hosea 1:9

¹³³ cf. Matthew 8:12; 21:43a

¹³⁴ Acts 2:37-41

¹³⁵ cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5

¹³⁶ 1 Peter 2:9-10

¹³⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13; 2:11-22

¹³⁸ Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-18; 3:2-6; Colossians 3:11-12

¹³⁹ Ephesians 2:11-22

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 8:11-12; 13:37-43; 21:42-44; John 15:6; Acts 13:45-48; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31

¹⁴¹ John 10:28; Philipppians 1:6

¹⁴² Luke 13:1-5

¹⁴³ John 3:3

¹⁴⁴ cf. Psalm 87:4-6; Isaiah 19:23-25; 56:1-8; Jeremiah 12:16

¹⁴⁵ Genesis 1-11: Adam, Henoah, Noah, Abraham etc.), Ruth the Moabite, Isaiah 56:3-8

¹⁴⁶ John 10:16; Revelation 5:9

¹⁴⁷ Romans 10:12

¹⁴⁸ Romans 1:16

¹⁴⁹ G: katakauchaomai

¹⁵⁰ G: bastazó

¹⁵¹ The meaning is not that Israel/Jewish believers supports Gentile believers, but that Jesus Christ supports believers from all nations!

¹⁵² G: legó eró eipon eóraka

¹⁵³ G: exeklaó

¹⁵⁴ G: egkentrizó

11:20. Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand¹⁵⁵ by faith. Do not think¹⁵⁶ high¹⁵⁷ (be arrogant), but be afraid¹⁵⁸.

11:21. For if God did not spare¹⁵⁹ (viad) the natural¹⁶⁰ branches, he will most surely not¹⁶¹ spare (vifd) you either.

The arrogant boasting and presumptuous confidence of some believing Gentiles, about the fact that they occupy a place of privilege and honour in God's Kingdom by the displacement of unbelieving Jews, is condemned. The mass of Israelites were broken off because of their unbelief and many Gentiles were grafted in because of their faith. The Gentiles stand only by faith, and not by any personal merit. The unbelief and disobedience of other Gentiles would certainly lead to the same fate as that of unbelievers in Israel.

The severity and kindness of God.

11:22. “Consider (see)¹⁶² therefore the kindness¹⁶³ and sternness¹⁶⁴ of God: sternness to those who fell¹⁶⁵ (the unbelieving Jews), but kindness to you (the believing Gentiles), provided that you continue¹⁶⁶ in his kindness. Otherwise¹⁶⁷ you also will be cut off¹⁶⁸.

11:23. And if they (the Jews) do not remain/persist (vspa) in unbelief, they will be grafted in (vifp), for God is able to graft them in again.

11:24. (After all), if then¹⁶⁹ you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature¹⁷⁰, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated¹⁷¹ olive tree, how much¹⁷² more (to a greater degree)¹⁷³ readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!”

The believing Gentiles should consider the kindness and sternness of God. All the Jews belonging to the natural nation of Israel that do not keep God's covenant demands, namely, to trust and obey him (believe in Jesus), will not be saved, either now or in the end-time. This is God's severity. And all Jews who do not persist in their unbelief and disobedience will certainly be grafted back into God's people and thus be saved forever. This is God's kindness. This severity and kindness of God towards the natural nation of Israel¹⁷⁴ is exactly the same towards all the natural Gentile nations.

The Gentile believers must consider how much they owe to the nation of Israel. The Gentile believers must not forget that God began his covenant people with the believers in the nation of Israel (1:16)¹⁷⁵. But especially from the first coming of Jesus Christ onwards God enlarged the Israel of God (the true Israel) to include believers from all the Gentile nations¹⁷⁶. ‘The olive root’, which represents Jesus Christ, the patriarchs and the covenant blessings promised to the patriarchs, now supports not only the believing Jews, but also the believing Gentiles. The absolute determining principle to belong to God's covenant people (the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ) is faith in Jesus Christ. Only by faith in Jesus Christ will both Jews and Gentiles be grafted into Jesus Christ, into his covenant with the patriarchs and into the covenant blessings¹⁷⁷.

(IV) 11:25-32. The mystery is how God works out his plan of salvation in history.

a. The mystery is not ‘when’, but ‘how’ God reaches the full number of God's saved people (11:25a).

11:25a. I do not want (vipa) you to be ignorant¹⁷⁸ (vnpa) of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be¹⁷⁹ conceited (wise in own estimation)¹⁸⁰;

¹⁵⁵ G: histémi stésó hestésa hestéka

¹⁵⁶ G: froneó

¹⁵⁷ G: hupsélos

¹⁵⁸ G: fobeomai

¹⁵⁹ G: feidomai

¹⁶⁰ G: hé fusis

¹⁶¹ G: mé pós . Pós + neg “How is it that not ‘becomes “most surely”

¹⁶² G: horaó opsomai eidon heóraka ófthén

¹⁶³ G: chréstotés

¹⁶⁴ G: apotomia sternness (< to cut right off, to cut short)

¹⁶⁵ G: píptó pesoumai epeson peptóka

¹⁶⁶ G: epimenó

¹⁶⁷ G: epei

¹⁶⁸ G: ekkoptó

¹⁶⁹ G: ei gar

¹⁷⁰ G: kata fusin contrary to nature, para fusi according to nature

¹⁷¹ G: kallielaios

¹⁷² G: posos -é -on how great/much/more

¹⁷³ G: mallon to a greater degree

¹⁷⁴ cf. Jeremiah 18:5-12

¹⁷⁵ cf. Matthew 10:5-6

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁷⁷ Galatians 3:26-29

¹⁷⁸ G: agnoeó

¹⁷⁹ G: eimi

¹⁸⁰ G: heautos fronimos

The word ‘mystery’. The Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature¹⁸¹ defines the word ‘musterion’ as the secret thoughts, plans and time periods of God which are hidden from the human reason, as well as from other comprehension below the divine level, and hence *must be revealed* to those for whom they are intended.” It is a truth that is hidden in the mind and counsel of God and therefore not accessible to men. The mysteries in the Bible were formerly unknown, but have in the meantime been revealed.

The mystery is the revelation that God uses the disobedience of some Jews (the fall of unbelievers among the Jews) (11:11)¹⁸² and the obedience of many believers among the Jews¹⁸³ to bring many Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ¹⁸⁴. God also uses these believers from the Gentile nations indirectly (10:19) and directly (10:17-18)¹⁸⁵ to bring many Jews to faith in Jesus Christ. The purpose of making this mystery known is that the believers among the Gentiles and the Jews would *realise that God made them inter-dependant of one another: that God is using the Jews to bring many Gentiles to salvation and he is using the Gentiles to bring many Jews to salvation!*

Refutation of the 2nd assumption of dispensationalist, namely, the temporary hardening of Israel. The theological view of certain Bible translations is that God would *first* save ‘the full number of believers from the Gentile nations’, and only *thereafter* save all Israel. They believe in the so-called future restoration of the natural nation of Israel. They believe that first the great mass of Gentiles would be saved and only thereafter the great mass of Jews would be saved. They divide the Bible into ‘dispensations’ and believe that the Gentiles are being saved during the so-called present 6th dispensation (the dispensation of the Church) and the Jews would only be saved during the so-called future 7th dispensation (the dispensation of the millennial kingdom). What is important for this view is *the chronology of God’s plan of salvation*: they say that God is doing nothing or little for the Jews at the present time, but later in future history God is going to save *all* the Jews! They say that this plan of God was ‘a mystery’ during the Old Testament period.

This view has no biblical warrant and must be rejected!

b. The mystery is that the believing Gentiles are equally heirs with the believing Jews.

‘The mystery’¹⁸⁶ is:

- above all “Christ in the believers”¹⁸⁷, in both *the chosen believing Jews* and in *the chosen believing Gentiles*¹⁸⁸
- a truth that was hidden for long ages past, but has now been revealed through the prophetic writings, namely that people in all the nations in the world may *become obedient to Christ through faith* (1:5; 16:25-26)
- the truth that in every generation a partial hardening has come over Israel (and the Gentile nations) and consequently the other part of Israel (and the Gentiles nations) is being saved. This will continue until the full number of believers from the heathen and the full number of believers from the Jews have been reached *simultaneously* at the second coming of Christ¹⁸⁹
- the truth that through the Gospel the chosen believers from the heathen nations have come on equal footing with the chosen believers from the natural nation of Israel¹⁹⁰!

What the Old Testament prophets did *not* know¹⁹¹, God revealed to the New Testament apostles¹⁹². He revealed to them that his plan of salvation not only included believing Jews, but also believing Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel¹⁹³ and that in the enfolding of God’s plan of salvation *an entirely new relationship would be established between believing Jews and believing Gentiles*. The believing Gentiles would be heirs of God’s future glory together with the believing Jews and share everything on completely equal terms! The Gentile believers and the Jewish believers would be members of one and the same Body of Christ¹⁹⁴ and equally share in all the promises God made in the Old Testament and in the New Testament¹⁹⁵.

The mystery is the enfolding of God’s plan of salvation in the New Testament in which believers from the Jews and believers from the heathen nations have a complete equal relationship. “The LORD your God ... shows no partiality¹⁹⁶”.

¹⁸¹ by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich

¹⁸² cf. John 1:11

¹⁸³ i.e. Joseph and Mary, the apostles, the many Christian disciples

¹⁸⁴ Acts 13:46-51

¹⁸⁵ cf. Isaiah 28:11

¹⁸⁶ To *mustérion*

¹⁸⁷ Colossians 1:27

¹⁸⁸ Colossians 3:11

¹⁸⁹ Romans 11:25-26

¹⁹⁰ Ephesians 3:2-6

¹⁹¹ cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁹² Ephesians 3:5

¹⁹³ Romans 1:16; Acts 10:24-25

¹⁹⁴ Ephesians 3:2-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13

¹⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:20

¹⁹⁶ Deuteronomy 10:17

Together the chosen Gentiles and the chosen Jews constitute:

- *the one flock of Christ*¹⁹⁷
- *the one Body of Christ*¹⁹⁸
- *the one temple of God*¹⁹⁹
- *the one Israel of God*²⁰⁰
- together “heirs in God’s people”²⁰¹
- *the one new man* created in Jesus Christ²⁰²
- together “sharers of all God’s promises in the Bible”²⁰³
- *the one people of God*²⁰⁴
- *the one Church*²⁰⁵.

From the first coming of Jesus Christ onwards there is no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile in Christ (10:12)²⁰⁶.

c. Israel experienced, not a temporary hardening, but a partial hardening (11:25b-26a)

11:25b-26a. Israel has experienced²⁰⁷ (vira) a hardening²⁰⁸ *in part*²⁰⁹ until²¹⁰ the full number²¹¹ of the Gentiles has come in (vsaa). And so (in this way)²¹² (cf. verse 31) all Israel²¹³ will be saved (vifp).”

Never a complete hardening, never a complete rejection. What (Jewish and Gentile) believers (and we) must know is that there was never a complete hardening and therefore never a complete rejection of the natural nation of Israel²¹⁴. The natural nation of Israel experienced ‘a hardening in part’ (11:7b-10) with a very specific purpose: namely, to save people from the Gentile nations! This partial hardening was the result of the persistent sin of the Israelites.

But ‘hardening in part’ also means that *the other part of the natural nation of Israel has not been hardened. That part (the remnant) has been saved during the Old Testament period (11:1-7a) and are currently being saved through the proclamation of the gospel (11:31) during the New Testament period!* In every generation between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ a part of the natural nation of Israel will come to faith in Jesus Christ and consequently be saved!

The wrong translation of Romans 11:25b-26a. These two Bible verses are translated incorrectly by the adherents of dispensationalism as: “Israel has experienced a temporary hardening until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And then (thereafter) all Israel will be saved.” See ‘the Living Bible’, ‘the Good News Bible’, and in Dutch: ‘het Levende Woord’, ‘het Boek’, ‘de Groot Nieuws Bijbel’, ‘NBV’ and ‘de Bijbel in gewone taal’! These translations are NOT based on the original Greek text of the Bible, but on a particular theological view of events in the end-time.

Bible Societies who publish these translations will have to reckon with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation 22:18-19. God will add the plagues in the Bible to those who add to the Bible and take away the share in the tree of life to those who take words away from the Bible!

Dispensationalism explains the words as if there would first be a temporary period of hardening of Jews until at the first return of Jesus Christ all believers from the Gentiles nations would have entered eternal life by being raptured (caught up into heaven). Then/thereafter there would be another period of salvation for all Jews on earth! They believe that there would still be a special future for the Jewish nation (Israel) and that God would remain faithful to his callous Jewish people! The word ‘until’ is explained as only till the end of the first period of hardening, that is, until the end of the so-called 6th dispensation or dispensation of the Church which consists mainly of Gentiles. During the so-called 7th dispensation or dispensation of the salvation of Israel, “all Israel” would be saved (11:26). “All Israel” is explained as numerically all Jews that ever lived in history or all Jews that live during the end-time²¹⁵.

¹⁹⁷ John 10:16

¹⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:13

¹⁹⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:16

²⁰⁰ Galatians 6:16

²⁰¹ Galatians 3:27-29

²⁰² Ephesians 2:14-18

²⁰³ Ephesians 3:2-6; see 2 Corinthians 1:20

²⁰⁴ 1 Peter 2:9-10

²⁰⁵ cf. 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22; Romans 14:1 to 15:13

²⁰⁶ Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 3:11

²⁰⁷ G: gīnomai genēsomai egenomén gegenémai (aoristic use of gegona)

²⁰⁸ G: pórósis

²⁰⁹ G: apo merous

²¹⁰ G: achris hou

²¹¹ G: to pléróma

²¹² G: houtós cf. verse 31!

²¹³ G: pas Israël

²¹⁴ or of any of the Gentile nations

²¹⁵ Dispensationalists are very divided among themselves: there are ‘pre-tribulation’-, ‘mid tribulation’-, and ‘post tribulation premillennialists.’

The correct translation of Romans 11:25b-26a. The correct translation of Romans 11:25b-26a is: “Israel has experienced a partial hardening until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved.” See Novum Testamentum Graeca (the original Greek text), NASB (1971), ANV (1983), NIV (1986), and in Dutch: SV (1618-19), NBG (1951), KBS Willibrord (1995), HSV (2010) and most translations in other languages! In Greek ‘apo merous’ means ‘for a part’ in contrast to ‘the whole’ and ‘kai houtos’ means ‘thus’, ‘in this way’²¹⁶.

During the Old Testament period there was never a time that ‘Israel as a whole’ had hardened themselves against God and his Anointed and that God had consequently hardened ‘Israel as a whole’! For example, the Bible shows clearly that during the Old Testament generation of the prophet Elijah 7000 Jews had not been hardened²¹⁷.

Also during the New Testament period there was never a time that ‘Israel as a whole’ had hardened themselves against God and his Christ and that God had consequently hardened ‘Israel as a whole’! The Bible shows clearly that during the New Testament period many Jews had not been hardened. For example, the disciples of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul and thousands of others²¹⁸ were all Jews, but their hearts were not hardened. Paul wrote that “at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (11:5).

In every generation God chooses a remnant by grace²¹⁹! Thus, a part of the natural nation of Israel had never been hardened²²⁰, but the other part of the natural nation of Israel had been hardened²²¹! The purpose of this sovereign partial hardening of Israel was to also save people from the Gentile nations – even to save the full number of them!

The word ‘until’²²² in Matthew 23:39, Luke 21:24, Acts 3:21, Romans 11:25, 1 Corinthians 11:26, 1 Corinthians 15:25 and Revelation 20:3,5 do NOT end at the end of the period of hardening of Jews so that another period of salvation of Jews follows, but in all instances ends at the second coming of Christ! Thereafter there will NOT be another period of salvation of Jews! The word ‘fulness’²²³ is the full number of chosen believers from the Jews²²⁴ as well as from the Gentiles²²⁵ - the believers that are not cut off from the olive tree by their unbelief and disobedience²²⁶.

The word ‘thus (in this manner)’²²⁷ refers to the way in which these fullnesses are reached. *The fullness is reached by adding together all the remnants of chosen believers in every generation*, for example, the 7000 from the generation of Elijah (874 – 845 B.C.)²²⁸, the survivors from the generation of Isaiah (740-680 B.C.)²²⁹, the remnant from the people of God after the Shepherd had been crucified (30 A.D.)²³⁰ and the remnant chosen by grace at “the present time” in the generation of the apostle Paul (57 A.D.)²³¹, namely, those Jews and those Gentiles that have been baptised with the Holy Spirit²³²!

d. The fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of Israel (11:12,25b-26a).

The Greek word ‘pleroma’ means ‘the fullness’ in the sense of ‘*the full number*’²³³. Between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ more and more people from the Gentile nations and from the nation of Israel would hear the gospel and come to faith in Jesus Christ. The number of people that are being saved from the natural Gentile nations and from the natural nation of Israel would grow until it has reached ‘the full number’.

The fullness of the chosen believers from the Gentile nations (11:25b). The Greek text does not say ‘all the Gentiles’, but ‘the fullness of the Gentiles’. *The words express election.* The total of ‘the chosen remnants’ of Gentile believers in every generation throughout history will be ‘the full number’ of believers in Jesus Christ from the natural nations of the Gentiles at his second coming.

The fullness of the chosen believers from the nation of Israel (11:12b). The total of ‘the chosen remnants’ of Jewish believers in every generation throughout history²³⁴ will be ‘the full number’ of believers in Jesus Christ from the natural nation of Israel at his second coming.

²¹⁶ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich. 1952

²¹⁷ 1 Kings 19:18; 11:3-4

²¹⁸ Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7

²¹⁹ Romans 11:5; cf. 9:6-18

²²⁰ Romans 11:1-7a

²²¹ Romans 11:7b-10

²²² achri hou

²²³ to plérōma

²²⁴ Romans 11:12

²²⁵ Romans 11:25

²²⁶ Romans 11:16-24

²²⁷ G: houtós

²²⁸ Romans 11:4

²²⁹ Isaiah 1:9

²³⁰ Zechariah 13:7-9

²³¹ Romans 11:5-7

²³² 1 Corinthians 12:13, cf. Acts 10:24; 11:14-18

²³³ Greek dictionary

²³⁴ cf. Romans 11:4-5

The word ‘all’²³⁵ in the Gospels *usually do not mean ‘all people that ever lived in human history’*. For example, *not all people that ever lived were along the shore at the water’s edge*²³⁶. Not all people were amazed²³⁷. Not all people sat in groups on the green grass²³⁸. Not all people saw Jesus²³⁹.

Likewise, the word ‘all’ must be explained in its context. Just as the word ‘all’ in Romans 5:18 must be interpreted in terms of its context, Romans 5:17, so the word ‘all’ in Romans 11:32 must be interpreted in terms of its context, Romans 11:25-32. The word ‘all’ in Romans 11:26 is limited to the elect.

It *does not* have the same meaning:

- as in Romans 5:18a and 1 Corinthians 15:22a (‘all’ natural people that are bound to Adam, are condemned and will certainly die). Here the word includes all people that ever lived.
- as in Romans 11:32 (“God will show his mercy to ‘all’). Here the word is limited to the elect, whether they come from the Jews or the Gentiles”
- as in Romans 5:18b and 1 Corinthians 15:22b (‘all’ people that are bound to Christ are justified and will live forever). Here the word is limited to the elect.

The words ‘all Israel’²⁴⁰ in 1 Kings 8:65 mean ‘the vast assembly of Israelites who believed in the Lord and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles or Dedication of the Temple. In 1 Kings 11:16 ‘all Israel’ mean ‘the whole Israelite army’. In both cases the words ‘all Israel’ do *not* mean ‘all Jews that ever lived in history’. *In Romans 11:26 the words ‘all Israel’ also do not mean ‘all Jews that ever belonged to the natural nation of Israel’.* They also do not mean ‘all the Jews that will belong to the natural nation of Israel in the end-time’.

‘All Israel’ rather consists of: Abraham, the father of the covenant²⁴¹, the 7000²⁴²; the other heroes of faith from the Old Testament period²⁴³, the 12 apostles²⁴⁴, the ‘chosen remnant’ of Jews from the first century A.D.²⁴⁵ and all the elect Jews throughout the whole New Testament period that have been grafted into God’s New Testament covenant people through their faith in Jesus Christ²⁴⁶.

In what way will the fullness of the chosen Gentiles and the fullness of the chosen Jews be reached? The Greek text of Romans 11:26a does not say: “And *then (thereafter)* all Israel will be saved”, but “*thus (in this way)* all (the chosen in) Israel will be saved.” The fullness is reached by adding the chosen remnants in every generation together! When the full number of chosen believers from the Gentiles have once for all been reached at the second coming of Jesus Christ, *there will be no further proclaiming of the gospel*. Therefore the full number of chosen believers from Israel is reached simultaneously at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “The gospel will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (including the nation of Israel) and then the end will come²⁴⁷”. Thus, when the last chosen people have come to faith in Jesus Christ, the end will come.

The relationship between verse 25 and 26. The salvation of all the chosen in Israel is not the mystery itself, but the *consequence* of the mystery. The mystery reveals that the inter-dependence between the partial rejection of the natural nation of Israel (the Jewish unbelievers) and thus the partial acceptance of the natural nation of Israel (the Jewish believers in Christ) on the one hand and the same for the Gentiles on the other hand is the way in which the salvation of the full number of the chosen Jews or ‘all Israel’ is being accomplished.

Which Israel is saved?

- The term ‘all Israel’ cannot refer to ‘the Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:14-16 where it refers to all the elect from both the Jews and the Gentiles. They are people who “boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ”, who “have been crucified to this sinful world and have become a new creation”. But the term ‘all Israel’ in Romans 11:26 refers only to the chosen believers from among the Jews in contradistinction to the chosen believers from among the Gentiles.
- The term ‘all Israel’ cannot be extended to include all the people of the natural nation of Israel throughout the centuries, because it would then refer to the universal salvation of Jews. This view would ignore the fact that throughout the Old and New Testaments, God has rejected and judged the unbelieving and disobedient Israelites²⁴⁸. Paul explicitly excludes the universal salvation of Jews. “Though the number of the (natural) Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only the (chosen) remnant will be saved” (9:6,27),

²³⁵ G: pas pantos

²³⁶ Mark 4:1

²³⁷ Mark 5:20

²³⁸ Mark 6:39

²³⁹ Mark 9:15

²⁴⁰ G: pas Israël

²⁴¹ Genesis 15:6; 22:18

²⁴² 1 Kings 19:18

²⁴³ Hebrews 11

²⁴⁴ Romans 11:1

²⁴⁵ Romans 11:5

²⁴⁶ Romans 11:23-24,31

²⁴⁷ Matthew 24:14; cf. Acts 20:24-25

²⁴⁸ Daniel 12:2; Matthew 8:12

Throughout Romans 9, Paul challenges a nationalistic conception of Israel. Jews do not become the true Israel or true children of God by natural descent, but only by God's sovereign promise, God's sovereign election, God's sovereign calling and God's sovereign love and mercy²⁴⁹.

- The term 'all Israel' cannot be limited to the whole natural nation of Israel or the great mass of natural Jews living in the last days. This would exclude all the Jews who have lived before the end-time and were believers in the Messiah during the Old Testament period or believers in Christ during the New Testament period. It would regard them as not belonging to 'all Israel' and consequently would regard them as 'not saved'.
- The term 'all Israel' means the total number of chosen believers from the Jews throughout the Old and New Testament periods. It refers to the sum total of all Israel's believing remnants throughout the centuries, for example: the believing remnant during Elijah's time²⁵⁰, the believing remnant during Isaiah's time²⁵¹, the believing 'little flock' consisting of the disciples of Jesus²⁵², who are nevertheless 'many in Israel'²⁵³, the believing remnant during Paul's time²⁵⁴ and the subsequent believing remnants in every age until the second coming of Christ²⁵⁵. It is 'in this way' (11:26) that 'all Israel' is saved, that is, that all the chosen believers in Israel are saved!

Paul is not concerned with how great this number of believing Jews might be, but the fact that God has not rejected his chosen people, the elected Israelites! Nevertheless, after the second coming of Christ, Revelation 7:9 speaks of "a great multitude that no one could count" and this certainly includes very many Jews who believe in Jesus Christ.

When will all Israel be saved?

Paul does *not imply a future interim period of time in which all Israel would be converted*. Nowhere does the Bible even *allude to* such an interim period of time between the entrance of the Gentile believers into God's Kingdom and the final end of the world. The final end for all people: Gentiles and Jews, believers and unbelievers, comes at the same time²⁵⁶! Paul is speaking of the way in which Jews are being saved NOW (11:14,30-31) in the present time and throughout the New Testament period until the second coming of Jesus Christ. He says, "*and in this way all Israel will be saved.*" He is saying that the interdependence between the partial rejection of people from the natural nation of Israel (and thus the partial acceptance of the others) and the salvation of the full number of people from the natural Gentile nations is *the way in which* God also accomplishes the salvation of the full number of people from the natural nation of Israel! Also with the Gentile nations there is a partial rejection of unbelievers and a partial acceptance of believers²⁵⁷! The *time* at which the full number of saved people from the natural nation of Israel will be reached will *coincide* with the time the full number of saved people from the natural Gentile nations is reached! *Not before or after that!*

The conversion of Israel throughout history. What Paul has in view in Romans 11:11-15, is not the conversion of Israel in the end-time, but *the conversion of Israel throughout history*. Israel must be provoked to envy *NOW in our present history* and that was exactly what the apostle Paul did in his own ministry (11:14,30-31). Thus, what belongs to 'all Israel' at the end-time is *gathered throughout the centuries through the preaching of the gospel* to the Jews (cf. 1:16; 3:21-22)²⁵⁸!

Romans 11:23 is NOT a *prophetic statement* that in the end-time the whole natural nation of Israel existing at that time would not persist in their unbelief. It is also NOT a prophetic statement that in the end-time all the natural people belonging to the natural nation of Israel throughout the centuries would not persist in their unbelief (as if somehow all Jews would get a second chance to be saved). What Paul has in view is a *principle* that is true throughout history for both Jews and Gentiles, namely that *people can only be saved through faith after they have heard the preaching of the gospel*. Romans 10:14-17 clearly teaches this. Paul sees no other way for *the conversion of Israel than through the preaching of the gospel in the historical present and their responding to God's condition of personal faith* (11:23a). The history of salvation from the first to the second coming of Christ *runs parallel* for the nation of Israel and for every Gentile nation in the world. The way of salvation for Jews and for Gentiles is *exactly the same* (1:16; 3:22; 10:12-13)²⁵⁹!

God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament already *included* Gentiles²⁶⁰. But God's covenant with people *demand*s *faith from both* Jews and Gentiles (1:16; 11:23). The Bible clearly teaches that Jews and Gentiles in every age who do not believe, will not be saved (2:9)²⁶¹!

²⁴⁹ John 3:3-8; 6:44

²⁵⁰ 1 Kings 19:18

²⁵¹ Isaiah 1:9; 2:4

²⁵² Luke 12:32

²⁵³ cf. Luke 2:34; cf. Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31

²⁵⁴ Romans 11:5

²⁵⁵ Romans 11:23

²⁵⁶ Matthew 13:37-43; 23:39; 24:14,21-31; 25:31-33; Luke 21:24; John 5:28-29; Acts 3:21; 24:15; Romans 11:25, 1 Corinthians 11:26, 15:25; 2 Peter 3:7-13; Revelation 20:3,5,11-15

²⁵⁷ cf. Matthew 22:14; 24:24,31; John 6:44,37; 17:2,6,9,24; Romans 8:29-30,33; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 2:19; Revelation 17:14; 21:7-8

²⁵⁸ Acts 13:46-47; 28:17,13-24; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:6-8; Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:2-6; Colossians 3:11; the Letter to the Hebrews

²⁵⁹ Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11

²⁶⁰ Genesis 12:3; cf. Isaiah 56:3-8

²⁶¹ Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44; Revelation 21:8

The believing Jews and the believing Gentiles throughout the centuries constitute *one organism*: symbolised by ‘one flock’²⁶², ‘one olive tree’ (11:17-24), ‘one new man’²⁶³, ‘one Body’²⁶⁴ and ‘one chosen and holy people of God’²⁶⁵.

And the opportunity to be saved will end for both Jews and Gentiles at the second coming of Jesus Christ²⁶⁶! The partial salvation of both Gentiles and Jews continues throughout the centuries until the second coming of Christ. At that time, the full number of saved Gentiles and the full number of saved Jews will have been reached simultaneously.

**e. The Saviour already came out of Zion at his first coming (11:26b-27)
He will not come (from heaven) to Zion at his second coming.**

11:26b. As it is written (virp): ‘The deliverer²⁶⁷ will come²⁶⁸ (vifa) from²⁶⁹ Zion; he will turn²⁷⁰ (vifa) godlessness away from Jacob.

11:27. And this is my covenant²⁷¹ with them when I take away²⁷² their sins’.

From where would the Saviour come according to Old Testament prophecies? In Romans 11:26b-27 Paul does not quote one specific passage from the Old Testament, but gives a *summary of several Old Testament passages*: The Deliverer will come out of Zion” (Isaiah 59:20); “he will turn godlessness away from Jacob” (Isaiah 27:9a); “And this is my covenant with them” (Isaiah 59:21); “when I take away their sins” (Isaiah 27:9b). Thus, at his first coming, the Messiah-Deliverer:

- would come ‘out of’ Zion²⁷³.
- would come to Zion²⁷⁴.
- would come on behalf of Zion²⁷⁵.
- would remove the sin of Jacob²⁷⁶.
- And this is God’s covenant with them²⁷⁷ when he takes away their sins (Isaiah 27:9b in the Greek text).

Fulfilment of these prophecies. What has been prophesied in these quotations from the Old Testament has already been fulfilled during the first coming of Christ.

- He was born in Bethlehem and thus came out of Israel²⁷⁸.
- He came for or on behalf of the lost sheep of Israel, but they did not receive him²⁷⁹.
- He came for Israel, to save them from their sins²⁸⁰.
- And he made a new covenant with Israel²⁸¹.

These prophecies show that *the salvation or deliverance of Israel* quoted in the above mentioned Old Testament passages would not take place at the future second coming of Christ, because it *has already taken place at the first coming of Christ*. The salvation or deliverance of Israel quoted in the above mentioned Old Testament passages would not be from this or that future earthly enemy (regarded by some to be “the kings from the East”²⁸² or “the Antichrist and his army”²⁸³), but from their own “godlessness and sin” (11:26-27b)! In these prophecies, the Old Testament prophets were thinking of what Jesus Christ would do at his first coming²⁸⁴, not what Jesus Christ would do at his second coming.

- At his first coming Jesus Christ came ‘out of Zion’ to take away godlessness and sins (11:26c-27).
- But at his second coming he will come ‘out of heaven’²⁸⁵ and then forgiveness of sin will no longer be possible anymore²⁸⁶!

When did the Redeemer come to Israel to remove Israel’s sin? The Redeemer has already come at his first coming out of Zion to remove the godlessness of Jacob and to remove her sin (11:26b-27)! At that time by one sacrifice he had

²⁶² John 10:16

²⁶³ Ephesians 2:14-18

²⁶⁴ Ephesians 3:6

²⁶⁵ 1 Peter 2:9-10

²⁶⁶ Matthew 24:14; 25:10-13

²⁶⁷ G: ruomenos Deliverer <ruomai to deliver

²⁶⁸ G: hékó

²⁶⁹ G: ek

²⁷⁰ G: apostrefó

²⁷¹ G: diathéké

²⁷² G: afhairéó afeló aférethén afelómai (vsam)

²⁷³ Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6; Romans 11:26b

²⁷⁴ Isaiah 59:20 in the Hebrew text

²⁷⁵ Isaiah 59:20 in the Greek text

²⁷⁶ Isaiah 27:9a; cf. Acts 2:28

²⁷⁷ Isaiah 59:21 in the Greek text

²⁷⁸ Matthew 2:6; John 4:22

²⁷⁹ Matthew 15:24; John 1:11

²⁸⁰ Matthew 1:21; 10:6; Luke 19:10; Galatians 4:4-5

²⁸¹ Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:6-13

²⁸² Revelation 16:12. e.g. China and Russia

²⁸³ Revelation 19:19

²⁸⁴ 1 Peter 1:10-12

²⁸⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 19:11

²⁸⁶ Matthew 15:10-13; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

already made perfect forever those who are being made holy²⁸⁷. The meaning of Romans 11:26b-27 is NOT that in the future at his second coming Christ would come from heaven to Zion²⁸⁸, because the future tenses (will come, will turn) are in the quotations from the Old Testament before Christ's first coming and not in Paul's New Testament teaching after Christ's first coming!

Paul was not deviating from his theme in the letter to the Romans, namely, 'the justification by faith only'.

- While Romans 3 to 5 show that justification by faith is *doctrinal* (it is taught in the Bible)
- Romans 9 to 11 show that the doctrine of justification by faith is *historical* (it is related in the history of the Bible)

The letter to the Romans shows that in the salvation history of Israel, Jews were justified by faith during the Old Testament period (4:1-8; 9:25 to 10:8; 10:16-18). They were justified by faith during the time of the apostle Paul (10:9-15). And they will only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ throughout the centuries until the second coming of Jesus Christ (11:23,26-27). *Also for Jews there is no other way to be saved*²⁸⁹!

f. The chosen Jews are enemies and loved ones at the same time (11:28).

11:28. "As far as the gospel is concerned, they (not all Jews, but the chosen Jews) are enemies²⁹⁰ because of (NIV: on account of)²⁹¹ you (the chosen believers from the heathen nations); but as far as election is concerned, they are loved because of the patriarchs."

The chosen Jews before their conversion were enemies (11:28a). *To whom does Paul refer in verse 28?* He is speaking of people "who were once alienated from God and were 'enemies' (had a hostile disposition) in their minds as shown by their evil behaviour (towards believers from the Gentile nations)²⁹²." In the immediate context Paul is certainly *not* referring to the whole natural nation of Israel (all the Jews in the world). In the context he is still talking about 'the remnant (of Jews) chosen by grace' before the creation of the world (11:5)²⁹³ to be saved²⁹⁴. He is speaking about the Jews who would be grafted into the root (Christ) and the tree (the Body of Christ) when they stop to persist in their unbelief (11:23) and disobedience (evil behaviour)²⁹⁵. He is talking about the Jews that would be saved (11:26b), whose godlessness would be taken away (11:26c) and whose sins would be forgiven (11:27)²⁹⁶. Paul is clearly speaking only of the elect Jews.

In Paul's time these chosen Jews were not yet saved, but behaved as enemies of Jesus Christ²⁹⁷, as enemies of the Christian Church and Christians²⁹⁸ and as enemies of the proclamation of the gospel (11:28)²⁹⁹, just like Paul himself had done before his conversion. Before Paul believed in Christ he was an enemy of Christians³⁰⁰ and of Jesus Christ³⁰¹. But after he believed in Christ he obeyed Christ and proclaimed Christ everywhere³⁰². *The word 'enemies' refers to their objective alienation from God, from Christ and from God's favour and blessings* and only in secondary instance to their possible subjective (disposition, hateful thoughts and feelings of) enmity. But as repeatedly happens in history, when these Jews are still unbelievers they are enemies of Christ, the gospel and Christians. This is also true of Gentiles (cf. 5:9-11). They were 'enemies on account of the chosen believers from the Gentiles', because their enmity made it possible that the gospel was proclaimed to the Gentiles and that many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus Christ³⁰³.

The chosen Jews have always been God's loved ones (11:28b). Although these Jews were still enemies of Christ, Christians, the Christian Church and the proclamation of the gospel before their conversion to Jesus Christ, they were at the same time God's loved ones precisely because God had chosen them before the foundation of the world to be saved (8:29-30; 9:13)³⁰⁴. God loves them with an eternal love³⁰⁵. From eternity God loved that 'world' of chosen people from every nation that he sent the Saviour³⁰⁶ to save them³⁰⁷. Thus, God loves the people he chose³⁰⁸!

The word 'loved ones':

²⁸⁷ Hebrews 10:14

²⁸⁸ Zechariah 14:4, "his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" is symbolic. *In the shadowy Old Testament revelation the LORD will appear on the Mount of Olives and it will split when his feet touches it. Compare Micah 1:3-4, "The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; ... and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart."* The 'standing', 'treading', 'melting' and 'splitting' are *symbolical, not literal!* When God approaches to judge the enemy, he opens a way for his people to flee. How he does that is not specified.

²⁸⁹ Acts 4:12

²⁹⁰ G: echthroi di humas.

²⁹¹ G: dia + accusative

²⁹² Colossians 1:21

²⁹³ Ephesians 1:4

²⁹⁴ Ephesians 1:5-7

²⁹⁵ Hebrews 4:2,6

²⁹⁶ Acts 5:31

²⁹⁷ Acts 3:13-15; Acts 4:10-12

²⁹⁸ Acts 8:1; Acts 5:18,33; Acts 6:11

²⁹⁹ Acts 4:2,18-20; ; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

³⁰⁰ Acts 26:9-11; 1 Timothy 2:13

³⁰¹ Acts 26:14-15

³⁰² Acts 26:19-23

³⁰³ Acts 11:19-26; 13:44-48

³⁰⁴ Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10

³⁰⁵ Jeremiah 31:3

³⁰⁶ John 4:42; 1 John 4:14. The Saviour of all the chosen in the world.

³⁰⁷ John 3:16

³⁰⁸ Romans 9:11-13

- above all refers to their objective election by God³⁰⁹, to their consequent reconciliation with God and to their acceptance into God's favour and blessings
- and only in secondary instance refers to them being loved in a subjective sense³¹⁰.

But the fact that they were God's loved ones had nothing to do with themselves: with their descent, religious and good works or free will, but only with God's covenant promise to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob³¹¹. This is also true of the Gentiles (cf. 8:39).

Election to privileges or to salvation? Some people argue that the expression 'his people' in Romans 11:2 can only refer to the whole natural nation of Israel elected to the privileges summarised in Romans 9:4-5.

But *since the first coming of Jesus Christ these privileges no longer belong exclusively to Israel*. The adoption of sons now also belongs to Gentile believers (cf. 9:4)³¹². The covenant now also belongs to Gentile believers³¹³. The ceremonial and civil laws of Israel have been fulfilled, cancelled and abrogated³¹⁴, but the moral law now also belongs to Gentile believers (13:8-10).

The temple worship had been abrogated³¹⁵ and Gentile believers now also form God's living temple³¹⁶. All the promises made to the natural nation of Israel now also belong to the Gentile believers³¹⁷. The patriarchs now also belong to the Gentile believers (4:16-17)³¹⁸. Gentile believers now also belong to Jesus Christ, who is God over all (people and everything else). Since the first coming of Jesus Christ there is no difference between Jew and Gentile anymore (10:12-13)³¹⁹! Thus the expression 'his people' in Romans 11:1 rather refers to the people whom God chose from the natural nation of Israel and the expression 'whom he foreknew' in Romans 11:2 refers to their election unto salvation (justification) as in Romans 8:29 (cf. 9:6b). *Only believers are regarded as God's people!*

Romans 11:16 says "If the root is holy, so are the branches". In final analysis, 'the root' is 'the Seed' of the covenant promise made to the patriarchs. The Seed is Jesus Christ³²⁰. Anyone connected to Jesus Christ is 'holy' (cf. 5:17-19). 'Holy' means set apart from ordinary use and devoted for (dedicated to) sacred use. And anyone broken off from the root by unbelief and disobedience remains lost³²¹. *It is thus not all the people connected to the patriarchs by natural descent that are holy, but only the people connected to 'the Seed', Jesus Christ' that are holy!*

God certainly remains faithful to his promises, but also to his threats (cf. 3:3-4)! 2 Timothy 2:12-13 says, "If we disown him (Jesus Christ) he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful (in carrying out his threat!), for he cannot disown himself."

g. God's gifts and calling with respect to his chosen people remain irrevocable (11:29).

11:29. For irrevocable³²² are the gifts³²³ and call³²⁴ of God.

God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. The word can also mean 'without regret', but here it means 'irrevocable'. The God of the Bible is unchangeable and will not change his mind or have regret about decisions he has made. No one can undo what God has decided or does.

God's gifts and calling in the Bible.

- *God's effective calling during the Old Testament period.* During the Old Testament period Abraham, the heroes of faith³²⁵, the 7000³²⁶ and many others who believed in the Messiah (11:3-4) belonged to this chosen part of the nation of Israel. Thus, at the first coming of Christ, God did not reject Israel as if not a single person would come to faith in Jesus Christ anymore³²⁷.
- *God's effective calling during the New Testament period.* During the New Testament period not only the Jewish disciples of Jesus Christ were called effectively³²⁸, but also many more Jews were called effectively to faith in Jesus

³⁰⁹ Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16a

³¹⁰ Hosea 11:1-4

³¹¹ Genesis 12:3; 22:17-18; 28:14; cf. Galatians 3:16

³¹² Ephesians 1:4-5

³¹³ Hebrews 8:6-13

³¹⁴ Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15; cf. Hebrews 7:12

³¹⁵ Matthew 27:51; John 2:19-21; Acts 7:48-49; 17:24-25

³¹⁶ Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5

³¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:20

³¹⁸ Galatians 2:13-14; 3:26-29

³¹⁹ Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 3:11

³²⁰ Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16

³²¹ John 14:6; cf. 15:6

³²² ametameléta < a + metamelomai (to feel regret, repent) and also to change one's mind.

³²³ G: ta charismata

³²⁴ G: hé klésis

³²⁵ Hebrews 11

³²⁶ 1 Kings 19:18

³²⁷ Romans 11:1

³²⁸ John 15:16

Christ: the 3000 Jews from many countries in the world³²⁹; the 5000 Jews³³⁰; the men and women who were daily added to their number³³¹; and the large number of Jewish priests³³², etc. belonged to the ‘remnant chosen by grace’ (11:5). Paul himself was first an enemy of Christ, of Christians and of the gospel, but became a believer after Christ called him effectively (11:1-2)³³³.

- *In every generation of Jews until the second coming of Christ there will be a remnant chosen by grace.* They will be God’s loved ones who will come to faith in Jesus Christ³³⁴.
- Paul says that ‘this generation’ (of Jews, e.g. the Jews as a natural nation) will certainly not pass away until the second coming of Christ³³⁵. The Jews as a nation will not disappear from history. God will continue to effectively call the chosen part of the natural nation of Israel to faith in Jesus Christ right up to the second coming of Christ.
- *God’s gifts and calling in the Bible are not for everyone, but for the chosen part.* God’s gifts and calling are thus not for everyone within the natural nation of Israel. Likewise, God’s gifts and calling are also not for everyone within the natural nations of the Gentiles (8:29-30,33)! The words “for irrevocable are God’s gracious gifts and his calling” cannot refer to God’s love for the natural nation of Israel in general. It cannot refer to a love that first tolerates the hardened hearts³³⁶ of Jews throughout the centuries and then saves all of them in the end-time. Romans 11:7b-10 clearly teaches that God hardens Jews that were not elected forever.

God’s irrevocable gifts. *The nature of God’s gifts* is irrevocable. ‘The gifts’ cannot refer to the special privileges that were once given to the nation of Israel (9:4-5), because these privileges were never irrevocable. As *exclusive privileges to Israel* these privileges came to an end at the first coming of Christ! ‘The gifts’ must refer to products of God’s special grace: such as faith, hope, love, peace that passes all understanding, eternal life, etc. They must refer to gifts that God bestows on the elect and on them alone: every spiritual blessing, adoption to sonship, the riches of God’s glorious grace, redemption through his blood, forgiveness of sins and knowing the mystery of his will³³⁷!

God’s irrevocable calling. ‘The calling’ is not only an outward calling to believe through the proclamation of the gospel, but especially the inner calling that creates genuine faith through the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind and heart of a person³³⁸. God’s calling is always effective! A person whom God calls in this way will come to faith in Jesus Christ³³⁹! God calls people not only to faith³⁴⁰, but also to a task³⁴¹. *God’s election of the whole natural nation of Israel to certain privileges is not the same as God’s election of the remnant of Israel to salvation.* That which is irrevocable is *the nature of God’s calling!* God’s call is not subject to change and is never withdrawn. God’s call refers to the inner and effectual calling of God unto salvation, which is based on his eternal election (1:6-7; 8:28-30; 9:11-12). In the context of the whole letter to the Romans ‘the calling’ can therefore only pertain to the elect among the people of the natural nations. It certainly does not pertain to all the people of the natural nation of Israel.

In Romans 11:30-31 Paul *illustrates the irrevocability of God’s gifts and calling* by the conversion of all the elect Gentiles and all the elect Jews in history.

h. God uses the chosen Jews and the chosen Gentiles for one another’s salvation (11:30-31).

11:30. For³⁴² just as³⁴³ you (the elect Gentiles, plural) were at one time³⁴⁴ disobedient³⁴⁵ (viaa) to God, have now received mercy³⁴⁶ (viap) as a result of their (the Jews) disobedience³⁴⁷,

11:31. so (in this way, likewise)³⁴⁸ they (the elect Jews) too have now become disobedient (viaa) due to the mercy³⁴⁹ shown to you³⁵⁰ (the elect Gentiles), in order that they (the elect Jews) too may (now) receive mercy³⁵¹ (vsap).

Note the words: “Just as ... so.” *Since the first coming of Jesus Christ, God’s New Testament plan for the salvation of the chosen Jews follows exactly the same pattern as his plan for the salvation of the chosen Gentiles!*

³²⁹ Acts 2:41

³³⁰ Acts 4:4

³³¹ Acts 5:14

³³² Acts 6:7

³³³ Acts 26:9-20

³³⁴ cf. John 6:44,37

³³⁵ Matthew 24:34

³³⁶ hardened by unbelief and disobedience (Matthew 13:14-15; Hebrews 4:2,6)

³³⁷ Ephesians 1:3-10

³³⁸ cf. Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:27

³³⁹ cf. Romans 8:29-30; 10:11

³⁴⁰ Romans 1:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

³⁴¹ Romans 1:1; Acts 26:17-18

³⁴² G: gar

³⁴³ G: ósper

³⁴⁴ G: pote

³⁴⁵ G: apeitheó

³⁴⁶ G: eleeó

³⁴⁷ G: apeitheia

³⁴⁸ G: houtós

³⁴⁹ G: to eleon

³⁵⁰ G: humeteros belonging to you

³⁵¹ G: eleeó

Note the words: “At one time ... now.” There was always first disobedience³⁵² and then only the possibility for salvation³⁵³.

God shows his mercy to the chosen Gentiles by what happened to the Jews (11:30). The Jews had fallen away from God’s covenant people because of their unbelief and disobedience (11:23)³⁵⁴. Because the unbelieving and disobedient part of the Jews rejected the gospel, the believing and obedient part of the Jews (the apostles and their co-workers) went to the Gentiles and proclaimed the gospel to them³⁵⁵. In the past many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus Christ and in the present many are still coming to faith. In this way God shows his mercy and grace to the chosen Gentiles that formerly lived in unbelief and disobedience (cf. 1:18). This happened ‘now’, that is, in the time of the apostle Paul, and is still happening today. Thus from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ, God continues to show his mercy and grace to the chosen Gentiles.

God shows his mercy to the chosen Jews by what happens to the Gentiles (11:31). The Jews saw how God’s mercy to the Gentiles transformed the Gentiles and they also heard the proclamation of the gospel by the Gentiles. This either made the Jews envious (10:19) or caused them to respond to the gospel (10:17-18). Jews came to faith in the past and are still coming to faith in Jesus Christ today. In this way God shows his mercy and grace to the chosen Jews that formerly lived in unbelief and disobedience³⁵⁶. This happened ‘now’, that is, in the time of the apostle Paul, and is still happening today. Thus from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ, God continues to show his mercy and grace to the chosen Jews.

i. God first binds all his chosen people (Gentiles and Jews) over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on all his chosen people (Gentiles and Jews)(11:32).

11:32. For God has *once for all* bound over (shut together like a net, to enclose, to imprison, to lock up)³⁵⁷ (viaa) them all³⁵⁸ to disobedience, so that he may *once for all* have mercy (vsaa) on them all.

God’s condemnation of all people and God’s salvation of all the elect.

‘All people’ bound to Adam by nature, that is, all natural people except Jesus, share once for all in the fall of man into sin and are by nature sinful and condemned to eternal death (3:10-12,23; 5:17a 18a, 19a)³⁵⁹. They do not submit themselves to God and also cannot submit themselves to God (8:5-8)³⁶⁰. The sinful nature of all natural Jews³⁶¹ and all natural Gentiles³⁶² made them prisoners of disobedience. They are only able to submit themselves to God after God has chosen them (8:29-30,33) and has taken the initiative to proclaim the gospel to them. In this sense God has locked all people up in the prison of the disobedient. They will all perish forever *unless* God takes the initiative to show mercy to them. The unimaginable love and grace of God brings all the chosen believers from the Jews and the Gentiles to receive God’s mercy. *The fall into sin is universal, but salvation is limited to the chosen believers.*

‘All people’ bound to Jesus Christ by faith, that is, all chosen Jews and chosen Gentiles are shown mercy. By faith they receive God’s grace. By faith Christ’s righteousness is *imputed* (ascribed, reckoned) to them and by regeneration *imparted* to them (1:16; 3:24). Consequently God henceforth regards and treats them as perfectly justified (saved) in his eyes (8:33) and as reigning in eternal life (5:17b, 18b, 19b)³⁶³. They are saved by grace through faith. So even faith is not from themselves, because faith is the sovereign gift of God³⁶⁴.

All people are locked up in disobedience, but all the elect are granted mercy. When Romans 11:32 is taken out of its context, it could mean that God had *first* locked up all people that ever existed in the prison of disobedience and *later* has mercy on them all. This is the false teaching of universal salvation: all people would first be lost, but then are later saved!

The context of verse 32 is verse 30-31! The first word ‘for’³⁶⁵ connects Romans 11:32 to Romans 11:30-31. Verse 32 does not contradict verse 30-31. What is written in verse 32 summarises what is written in Romans 11:25-32.

For God locked up the full number of Gentiles (11:26) that *later* prove to be chosen (in 11:30) and locked up the full number of Jews (11:12,26) that also later prove to be chosen (in 11:31) in the prison of disobedience (together with all other people that have not been chosen)(3:23), so that he in absolute sovereign freedom could show his mercy and grace to all the elect Gentiles and all the elect Jews by saving them. Paul was not speaking about ‘universal salvation, but only about salvation of the chosen believers among the Gentiles and the Jews.

³⁵² cf. Ephesians 2:1-3,11-12

³⁵³ Cf. Ephesians 2:13-18

³⁵⁴ cf. Hebrews 4:1-6)

³⁵⁵ John 17:20-21; Acts 11:19-26; 13:44-48; Romans 1:16

³⁵⁶ Hebrews 4:1-6

³⁵⁷ G: sugkleiό

³⁵⁸ G: tous pantas

³⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:22a; John 3:18,36b

³⁶⁰ Galatians 3:22-23

³⁶¹ Romans 2:5

³⁶² Romans 1:24,26,28

³⁶³ 1 Corinthians 15:22b

³⁶⁴ Acts 13:48; Acts 16:14; Acts 18:17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1; Hebrews 12:2

³⁶⁵ G: gar

Just as the word all in Romans 5:18b must be interpreted in terms of its context, Romans 5:17b, likewise the word all in Romans 11:32b must be interpreted in terms of its context, Romans 11:25-31. In their natural unregenerate state, all Gentiles and Jews are locked up in the prison of disobedience. They all are sinners and lost (3:23). No one is righteous by nature (3:10). All are condemned (doomed)(5:18)³⁶⁶. However, through the preaching of the gospel, God's righteousness is revealed (1:16-17) and God graciously has mercy on all the elect by justifying them all through faith (3:24; 5:17-18). The reality of disobedience (of all natural people) is for the purpose of promoting mercy (towards all the elect)! Like in Romans 9:15-16, so also in Romans 11:32 *it is God's compassion and mercy which triumphs!* No one deserves eternal salvation. Everyone deserves eternal damnation. God shows his mercy to the Gentiles by saving all the elect Gentiles and he shows his mercy to Israel by saving all the elect Jews. The emphasis in Romans 11 is entirely on God's sovereign mercy and grace in the execution of his whole plan of salvation for the world. God's holiness and righteousness demands the eternal punishment of all people, but God's love and mercy nevertheless grants eternal life to the elect who in the end will be uncountable³⁶⁷!

11:33-36. God's plan of salvation is unfathomable.

a. God's wisdom, knowledge, judgements and ways.

11:33. Oh, the depth³⁶⁸ of the riches³⁶⁹ of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unfathomable / unsearchable³⁷⁰ his judgements, and untraceable / incomprehensible³⁷¹ his paths!

This refers on the one hand to God's enormous great patience, sternness and judgements towards the objects of his wrath (9:22; 11:22,33) and on the other hand to God's unimaginable mercy and grace towards the objects of his mercy (9:23)!

Both Jews and Gentiles cannot fathom God's plan of salvation of Jews and of Gentiles. God had to reveal this 'mystery' (11:25a)³⁷². No human being could invent a plan in which on the one hand God fulfils his covenant promise to Israel and on the other hand saves so many Gentiles! No one could think of a plan in which God on the one hand uses the Jews to save the Gentiles and on the other hand uses the Gentiles to save the Jews!

Until the second coming of Jesus Christ, God will show mercy and grace to all Gentiles and all Jews who put their faith in Jesus Christ (9:33)! At the second coming of Jesus Christ, the fullness of the chosen believers from among the Gentiles and the fullness of the chosen believers from among the Jews will be reached simultaneously (11:25-26)! That is why after the first coming of Jesus Christ there is no difference between Jew and Gentile anymore (10:12)! That is why the God of the Jews is also the God of the Gentiles (3:28-29). That is why God justifies the Jews and the Gentiles in exactly the same way³⁷³!

By reflecting on God's plan of salvation, Paul bursts out in a song of praise concerning the unfathomable riches of God's wisdom, knowledge, judgements and ways (11:33).

- His 'wisdom' is his practical arrangement and adaptation of everything and everyone to fulfil his eternal plan and designs³⁷⁴.
- His 'knowledge' is his all-inclusive and exhaustive knowledge and understanding (insight) of everything and everyone³⁷⁵.
- His 'judgements' are his sovereign decisions and determinations with respect to everything that happens to everyone, including their election, creation, salvation or judgement (cf. 9:18,22; 11:5-10,20-22,25,32).
- His 'ways' are his particular dealings with people, including the execution of his eternal decreed will³⁷⁶.

The incomprehensibility applies to God's counsel that has been revealed! Paul is overwhelmed with the unfathomable depth of God's scheme of salvation. He is *especially thinking of the interdependence between the salvation of the chosen Gentiles and the salvation of the chosen Jews* (11:13-15,25-26,30-32).

Especially in Romans 11:11-32 he deals with Israel in relation to God's world-wide redemptive design and shows how both *the rejection of Israel*, culminating at the first coming of Christ³⁷⁷, and *the present restoration of Israel*, throughout the New Testament period (11:5) until the second coming of Christ, promote the salvation of the elect Gentiles in the whole world, called "the reconciliation of the world" in Romans 11:15. Looking at the future unfolding of this saving design of God, Paul sees the full number of the chosen believers from the Gentile nations and the full number of the chosen believers from Israel being reached simultaneously at Christ's second coming. It is this continuation of God's abounding mercy and grace that is *the final answer to the problem of apostate Israel*.

³⁶⁶ John 3:18,36

³⁶⁷ Revelation 7:9

³⁶⁸ G: bathos

³⁶⁹ G: ho ploutos

³⁷⁰ G: anexeraunétos

³⁷¹ G: anexichniastos

³⁷² cf. Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 36:9

³⁷³ Galatians 3:26-29

³⁷⁴ cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26 – 2:10

³⁷⁵ cf. Hebrews 4:13

³⁷⁶ cf. Ephesians 1:11; 3:8-12

³⁷⁷ John 1:11; Luke 10:16

In his unfolding of this prophetic survey, Paul places even the unbelief of Israel in the perspective of God's merciful design for both the elect Gentiles and the elect Jews. He also puts the unbelief of all the Gentile nations in the perspective of God's merciful design and makes the astounding statement of verse 32, "For God has *once for all* locked up them all (that is, all people in history) to disobedience, so that he may *once for all* have mercy on them all (that is, all the elect)".

11:34. Who has known (viaa) the mind of the Lord? Or who has been (viad) his fellow counsellor (advisor)³⁷⁸?

Verse 34 is a quotation from Isaiah 40:13 and implies that God alone, without dependence on any creature for counsel, devised the plan (of election, creation, salvation or judgement) which he executes with sovereign care.

11:35. Who has ever given (something) beforehand (in advance)(viaa) to God, that (would make God the debtor and that) God should repay (recompense)³⁷⁹ (vifp) him?

Verse 35 is a quotation from Job 41:11 and implies that God is debtor to nobody. So-called human merit places no constraint upon his mercy. *His grace (favour) is never a compensation for anything man has done!* The three questions in verse 34 and 35 all imply a negative answer and have their positive counterparts in God's self-sufficiency, sovereignty and independence.

11:36. For from him and through him and to him (are) all things. To him (be) the glory forever! Amen.

Verse 36 speaks of the Triune God as the Creator of everything, the Sustainer and the Director of everything to their proper end, and the Last End to whose glory all things will redound! He is the Source of our salvation, because he designed the plan of salvation and chose us from eternity to be his own people. He is the Accomplisher of our salvation, because by his mercy, grace and power he justified us and will save us completely. And he is the Goal of our salvation, because he created and saved us to live for his glory³⁸⁰. By saying, 'Amen' Paul gives his solemn affirmation and enthusiastic personal approval.

**b. Paul reveals the marvellous plan of God
by which he saves Gentiles through Jews and Jews through Gentiles,
resulting in the one worldwide Church.**

No longer any differentiation or separation of Israel and the Church. The New Testament reality is the fulfilment of the Old Testament shadows³⁸¹. It clearly teaches that *there is no eternal differentiation and separation of Israel and the Church. Israel (the believing Jews) is continued on a higher plane (of fulfilment) and enlarged to include the Gentile believers, together forming the New Testament Church.*

The New Testament clearly teaches that there is *no longer any differentiation or separation* between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

- "There shall be one flock and one shepherd"³⁸².
- "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right"³⁸³.
- "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile" (10:12).
- "The body is a unit, ... they (Jews and Greeks) form one body. We (Jews and Greeks) were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks ... and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"³⁸⁴.
- "There is neither (believing) Jew nor (believing) Greek, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"³⁸⁵.
- Jesus Christ abolished (the ceremonial law, which was) the dividing wall of hostility (between believing Jews and believing Gentiles) in order to create one new man (one Church) out of the two³⁸⁶.
- "The (believing) Gentiles are heirs together with (believing) Israel, members together of one body (the Church), and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus"³⁸⁷.
- "Here there is no Greek (believer) or Jew (ish believer), but Christ is all and is in all"³⁸⁸.

All the Old Testament prophets agree³⁸⁹ that the Old Testament promises concerning the restoration and rebuilding of Israel³⁹⁰ are fulfilled in God taking from the Gentiles a people for himself³⁹¹!

Throughout the New Testament period, 'God's chosen people' and 'God's covenant people' do not consist of natural Jews, but consists only of believers, whether they originally came from the Jews or the Gentiles³⁹². Throughout the New

³⁷⁸ G: ho sumboulos

³⁷⁹ G: antapodidómi

³⁸⁰ Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 3:16

³⁸¹ Hebrews 9:8-10; 12:1

³⁸² John 10:1

³⁸³ Acts 10:15,34

³⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

³⁸⁵ Galatians 3:28

³⁸⁶ Ephesians 2:14-16

³⁸⁷ Ephesians 3:6

³⁸⁸ Colossians 3:11

³⁸⁹ Acts 15:15

³⁹⁰ Amos 9:11-12

³⁹¹ Acts 15:14-18

³⁹² 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 2:9-10

Testament period, *'the children of Abraham'* did not come exclusively from Israel, but are only believers that originally came from the Jews and the Gentiles³⁹³.

The only visible picture of God's people throughout the New Testament history until Christ's second coming is *the Church* which consists of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. The only visible picture of God's people after Christ's second coming will be *'the New Jerusalem'* on the new earth also consisting of believing Jews and believing Gentiles³⁹⁴.

The correct interpretation of the Bible is that the true Israel of the Old Testament revelation (the believing remnant of the Jews)(11:1-10) has NOT become an unrecognisable and hidden entity, but has become *the very recognisable and visible Church* of the New Testament revelation! God's people, the true Israel, of the Old Testament revelation has *not been terminated* and has *not been replaced* by the Church of the New Testament revelation, but has been *continued and enlarged* to include the believers from among all the Gentile nations³⁹⁵! God's people, the Church³⁹⁶ of the New Testament revelation does NOT have its beginning in the New Testament, but has its beginning already in the Old Testament revelation³⁹⁷.

At his first coming Jesus Christ *fulfilled the Law and the Prophets* of the Old Testament revelation³⁹⁸ and *confirmed the promise made to the patriarchs* so that the Gentiles may also glorify God for his mercy (15:8-12)! At the first coming of Jesus Christ 'God's people' included "first the Jew" (1:16)³⁹⁹ "and then the Gentile"⁴⁰⁰. Since the first coming of Jesus Christ there is no differentiation any more between Jew and Gentile (10:12)⁴⁰¹, but *only one visible and very recognisable Church* consisting of believers from the natural nation of Israel and believers from all the other Gentile nations.

- It is the *one flock* consisting of sheep from the Jewish pen and sheep from the Gentile pens under one Shepherd⁴⁰².
- It is the *one olive tree* with one Root and many Jewish and Gentile branches (11:17-24).
- It is the *one Body of Christ* with one Head and many Jewish and Gentile members⁴⁰³.
- It is the *one temple of God* from which the dividing wall of hostility between Jewish believers and Gentile believers has been destroyed⁴⁰⁴.
- It is the *one new man created* out of the nation of Israel and the nations of the Gentiles.
- It is the *one people of God* or the *one household or family of God* in which Gentile believers have equal citizenship⁴⁰⁵.
- It is the *one spiritual house* with one precious Cornerstone that will never put believers to shame, but cause unbelievers to stumble⁴⁰⁶.
- It is the *one chosen people of God*, the *one holy nation* consisting of people who had formerly not received mercy⁴⁰⁷.
- It is the *one heavenly Jerusalem* consisting of people who are no longer slaves of the law, but children of the promise that are born by the power of the Spirit⁴⁰⁸, the *one enduring city* whose architect and builder is God and that is also called 'the Church of the firstborn'⁴⁰⁹, that will descend as the *one New Jerusalem* onto the new earth at the renewal of all things⁴¹⁰ and that will consist of Jewish believers and Gentile believers⁴¹¹.

The mystery that was formerly unknown, but now revealed is that the believers from the Gentile nations *are heirs on a complete equal basis* together with the believers from Israel⁴¹²!

Conclusion. After the first coming of Jesus Christ the New Testament revelation does NOT expect another visible and recognisable division between two entities: a fullness of Gentiles and another fullness of Israel (all Israel)⁴¹³! The Heavenly Jerusalem is⁴¹⁴ and the New Jerusalem will be *one visible entity* consisting of believers from all the different nations in the world on a complete equal basis: a unity with nevertheless great and glorious diversity within it⁴¹⁵!

³⁹³ Galatians 3:6-9,26-29

³⁹⁴ Revelation 21:1-2,9-10,12-14; cf. Galatians 4:21-31; Hebrews 12:22-24

³⁹⁵ Psalm 87:4-6; Isaiah 19:23-25; Isaiah 56:8; Jeremiah 12:16

³⁹⁶ G: ekklesia

³⁹⁷ H: qahal. Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28

³⁹⁸ Matthew 5:17

³⁹⁹ cf. Matthew 10:2-6

⁴⁰⁰ Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; Acts 10:28,34-35; Acts 13:45-48; 1 Peter 2:9-10

⁴⁰¹ Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11

⁴⁰² John 10:16

⁴⁰³ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4

⁴⁰⁴ Ephesians 2:14-15,21-22

⁴⁰⁵ Ephesians 2:19-20; 3:6

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Peter 2:4-8; cf. Luke 2:34

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Peter 2:9-10

⁴⁰⁸ Galatians 4:21-31

⁴⁰⁹ Hebrews 11:8-16; 12:22-24; 13:14. 'The firstborn' are the born-again believers.

⁴¹⁰ Revelation 21:1-2,9-10

⁴¹¹ Revelation 21:11-14

⁴¹² Ephesians 3:2-6; 2 Corinthians 1:20

⁴¹³ as C.I. Scofield in his "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth" (1907) and other dispensationalists believe

⁴¹⁴ Galatians 1:2; 4:26-31; Hebrews 11:10-16; 12:22-24; 13:14,24; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Peter 3:13

⁴¹⁵ Revelation 21:1-3,24,26