



*The Restoration  
of Israel*

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# *The Restoration of Israel*

An Excerpt from: *The New Covenant, Part 2*

Jon Bonker

The truth is, there's a surprise ending in the new covenant. Maybe you've read a book or seen a film with a surprise ending. Everything in the story was going just as it should have; and you fully expected it to turn out in a certain way. But just as the story is drawing to its close, *it takes a dramatic turn*; and you're left awed and speechless. Well, we're at a point now in our study where it seems we should be closing up shop. We've learned a lot about the covenants. We now have an understanding of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace; and we've seen how the Covenant of Grace is really just another name for the gospel. We've discovered that there's a fundamental unity between the Old and New Testaments. But at the same time, we've also learned how the new covenant is distinct from the old; and perhaps we've been amazed and humbled in particular that God's new covenant church has become universal in scope; so that instead of being limited to just one nation, God's grace is now extended worldwide. This seems a fitting place to say: *And God's people lived happily ever after.*

But the story doesn't end here. And in particular, *the story doesn't end here for ethnic Israel.* From what we've learned so far, we might be left with the impression that Gentiles have essentially taken the place of ethnic Jews in the new covenant church. That is, there's still a few believing Jews; but by and large, the church of the new covenant is primarily a *Gentile church*. It makes sense to us: In the Old Testament, God's people were largely Jews. But at Pentecost, the floodgates were burst open, so that now the nations have been included in God's plan of salvation. And at the same time, we know that the Jewish nation rejected their own Messiah; so it appears to us that God has given them over to the stubbornness of their ways; perhaps—we even think—fittingly so. And then, our own experience tends to validate these assumptions; because when we look at the church, it's predominately Gentile; and in fact, overwhelmingly so; to such an extent that it's a rare thing to even come across a Jewish believer in Christ. In Ephesians 3:1-10, Paul spoke about something that he referred to as *a mystery*; and the mystery was this: that *the Gentiles* have been grafted into the body of Christ. It's commonplace to us, but it would have been something astonishing and wonderful for Jews who were living in the days of the old covenant. Well, in Romans 11:25, Paul speaks about *another mystery*; and the mystery that he refers to *in this passage* has to do with *the Jews*. It will likely be just as astonishing and wonderful to us, but what Paul is going to share with us in Romans 11 is that *God isn't done with ethnic Israel.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We're going to get into Romans 11 below and make our conclusions from the text itself. But at the outset, we also wanted to provide a small sampling of quotes from significant theologians on this subject. To begin, Iain Murray shows this isn't a strange or outlandish teaching when he notes: "From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans." (*The Puritan Hope*). Witsius says: "We may reckon among the benefits of the New Testament the restoration of the Israelites, who were formerly rejected, and the bringing them back to the communion of God in Christ." (V2, p413). And Vos writes: "The Jews for the most part apostatized, but they were not all put aside so that the Gentiles simply take their place. Rather, the Gentiles were grafted as branches on the domesticated olive tree to share in the rich oil of the covenant (Romans 11)." (V2, p135). And he concludes: "It seems to us that the conversion of Israel is clearly predicted. But that will not occur in order to make Israel a special nation and give it back its old separate position; that would be an anachronism in the days of the New Testament. Nor will it be in order to return the Jews to the holy land." (V5, p279). Vos asks, "Where is the conversion of the Jews spoken of as a sign of the end? In general, in all the prophecies of the Old Testament that speak of the apostasy and the return of the Jews; more specifically, in Zechariah 12 and Romans 11. Romans 11 speaks of a national conversion, that is, a conversion of the majority. . . what is meant is something as a whole, something national. . ." (V5, p279). Interestingly, Vos later addresses why some are fearful to embrace this doctrine: "What makes the treatment of the further details of this conversion [of ethnic Israel] so difficult? Because for one thing it has been associated with the anticipated return of the Jews to the Holy Land, for another with the millennial kingdom. This already happened quite early (Justin, Irenaeus). In reaction, the opponents of chiliasm have not infrequently denied the general conversion of the Jews (e.g. Augustine)." (V5, p279). Jonathan Edwards asserts: "Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews is in the eleventh chapter of Romans. And there are also many passages of the Old Testament that cannot be interpreted in any other sense, that I cannot now stand to mention. Besides the prophecies of the calling of the Jews, we have a remarkable seal of the fulfillment of this great event in providence by a thing that is a kind of continual miracle, [namely] their being preserved a distinct nation in such a dispersed condition for above sixteen hundred years.

## TWO MYSTERIES INVOLVING GOD'S DEALINGS IN THE NEW COVENANT

	THE CONTENT OF THE MYSTERY	THE WONDER OF THE MYSTERY
EPHESIANS 3:1-10	Gentiles would also be co-heirs in the body of Christ	Common now but shocking in old covenant
ROMANS 11:25-26	Jews will yet again be co-heirs in the body of Christ	Common in old covenant but shocking now

*A) EXPOSITING the TEXT:* As we come to this passage in Romans 11, it would be good to begin with some context. Throughout chapters 9-10, Paul had been dealing with the **JEW'S REJECTION OF CHRIST**. In Romans 9, he writes: "What shall we say then? That *Gentiles*, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but *Israel*, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. . ." (vv30-32). And then later, in Romans 10, Paul quotes Moses and Isaiah as the Lord rebukes Israel and announces His future plan for including Gentiles: "Moses says, 'I will make you jealous by *that which is not a nation*, by a nation without understanding I will anger you.' And Isaiah is very bold and says, 'I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.' But as for *Israel* He says, 'All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'" (10:19-21). This last passage, in fact, represents the final words that Paul speaks in *Romans 10*; and thus serves as the immediate context of *Romans 11*. But what's important for us to see in all these passages leading up to Romans 11 is that when Paul uses the term "Israel" in this context, *he's talking about ethnic Jews*.

This is where we pick up with Romans 11, where Paul's main object in *verses 1-10* is to show us that **THE JEW'S REJECTION OF CHRIST IS NOT TOTAL**. He begins in verse 1 with an emphatic *declaration*: "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!" (cf. v2a). Paul goes on to use himself as a living *attestation* of this very truth: "For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." (vv1b-2). Again, it's clear from what Paul's saying here that he's talking about ethnic Israel; and he proceeds to set forth an *illustration* of the same truth from the Old Testament: "Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the divine response to him? 'I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" (vv2-4). Elijah thought he was the only one left in Israel who believed in the Lord during a time of great apostasy. If he was killed, it seemed faith in the Lord would vanish entirely. But God's response to Elijah showed that however bad things might get in Israel, the Lord himself was preserving a remnant of Israelite believers. Paul concludes with this *application*: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." (verse 5). In other words, Paul's telling us that the situation today in Israel is just like it was in Elijah's day. It may have seemed like there were no believers in Israel during that time—but God was at work all the while, behind the scenes, preserving a remnant for himself. And He's doing the same thing today. That's Paul's whole point here in this first section of Romans 11. The Jews' rejection of

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The world affords nothing else like it. There is undoubtedly a remarkable hand of providence in it. When they shall be called, then shall that ancient people that were alone God's people for so long a time be God's people again, never to be rejected more; they shall then be gathered into one fold together with the Gentiles; and so also shall the remains of the ten tribes wherever they be, and though they have been rejected much longer than the Jews, be brought in with their brethren, the Jews. The prophecies of Hosea especially seem to hold this forth, that in the future glorious times of the church both Judah and Ephraim, or Judah and the ten tribes, shall be brought in together, and shall be united as one people as they formerly were under David and Solomon as [in] Hosea 1:11, and so in the last chapter of Hosea, and other parts of his prophecy. Though we do not know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass, yet thus much we may determine by Scripture, that it will be before the glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished; because it is said that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles (Romans 11:12,15)." (*History of Redemption*). And Spurgeon says: "I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel. 'Thither they shall go up; they shall come with weeping unto Zion, and with supplications unto Jerusalem.' May that happy day soon come! For when the Jews are restored, then the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered in; and as soon as they return, then Jesus will come upon Mount Zion to reign with his ancients gloriously, and the halcyon days of the Millennium shall then dawn; we shall then know every man to be a brother and a friend; Christ shall rule with universal sway." (*Sermons, VI, 1855*). And Charles Hodge writes: "As the rejection of the Jews was not total, so neither is it final. . .The future restoration of the Jews is, in itself, a more probable event than the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of God." (*Romans*). We'll also be quoting others, such as Matthew Henry, John Gill, Roberts, and Haldane; along with more recent authors such as Douglas Moo. For a helpful summary of this subject, see Witsius' *The Restoration of the Jews*.

Christ is not total, because God is at work, behind the scenes, preserving for himself a remnant. Paul does end this section with a final *clarification*, in verses 6-10, that the vast majority of Israelites are still indeed hardened. But even in the midst of this general hardening, God is preserving His remnant.<sup>2</sup>

#### ROMANS 11:1-10: THE JEWS' REJECTION OF CHRIST IS *NOT TOTAL*

	WHAT SCRIPTURE DECLARES IN ROMANS 11:1-10	REFERENCE
PAUL'S DECLARATION	"I say then, God has not rejected His people. . ."	Rom.11:1-2
PAUL'S ATTESTATION	"For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham. . ."	Rom.11:1
PAUL'S ILLUSTRATION	"Or do you not know what the Scripture says. . .about Elijah?"	Rom.11:2-4
PAUL'S APPLICATION	"In the same way. . .there has also come to be at the present time a remnant"	Rom.11:5
PAUL'S CLARIFICATION	"What then? . . .those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened"	Rom.11:6ff

But that's not all. Paul's aim isn't just to tell us that God has an elect remnant among the Jews. It's not until the second part of the chapter that we get to the surprise ending; because what we're going to see is that just as the Jews' rejection of Christ is not total; it's also true that **THE JEWS' REJECTION OF CHRIST IS NOT FINAL**. As we get into this second part of the passage, it might be helpful to see that Romans 11 is structured around two questions; which, in turn, naturally divide the text into two distinct sections. In verse 1, Paul had asked: "*I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!*" Well, as we get to verse 11, Paul asks a second question: "*I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!*" He's referring to ethnic Jews, as a whole; for though God has a remnant among them, the great majority of them are hardened. Well, here in this second question, Paul's asking whether or not they did *stumble so as to fall*. In other words, he's asking if this hardening is going to last—if this is the end for Israel—if they've fallen for good—if they've stumbled in such a way that they'll never rise again. And Paul's answer is an emphatic, *no*. Let that sink in: Paul's telling us that though Israel has stumbled, becoming hardened as a nation; *it won't be the final word*.<sup>3</sup>

#### ROMANS 11:11-27: THE JEWS' REJECTION OF CHRIST IS *NOT FINAL*

	THE TWO QUESTIONS	THE TRUE MEANING
ROMANS 11:1	"God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!"	The Jews' rejection of Christ is <i>not total</i>
ROMANS 11:11	"they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!"	The Jews rejection of Christ is <i>not final</i>

Verses 11-16 show us *there was a design in Israel's hardening*, but it wasn't to cast Israel away. Rather, as Paul says in verse 11: "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles. . ." In other words, God had a design in giving the Jewish nation over to stumbling; but that design was never that they would stumble so as to fall—it was that by their stumbling the Gentiles might be saved. They've been hardened, to be sure. But that hardening came for a purpose—and it's to end in recovery. Paul is going to get back to the Jews' recovery in verses 25-26, but before he can talk more about the Jews, he knows he needs to address us as Gentiles. He doesn't want us to become arrogant about the way things have become in the church; and so, in verses 17-24, *Paul sets forth for us a lesson from Israel's hardening*. The church is like an olive tree: Abraham is the root; his descendants are the branches.

2 Thomas Blake says: "[The Apostle limits] this doctrine of [the Jews'] rejection. . . *That it was not total*. . . That it was not total, he first asserts, secondly proves. *Asserts*, verse 1, 'I say then, has God cast away his people? God forbid.' *Proves* by a threefold argument: 1) By instance in himself, verse 1: 'For I am also an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin', and he does not dispute for his own rejection. 2) By instance in the elect of God, verse 2: 'God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.' 3) From a parallel Scripture out of 1 Kings 18, which parallel he first lays down, verses 2-4. . . And afterward applies, verse 5: 'Even so then at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.' And so falls into a digression concerning grace and works (vv 6-11)." (*Treatise of the Covenant*, p324).

3 On Romans 11:11, Hodge notes, "This verse begins with the same formula as the first verse of the chapter, and for the same reason. As there the apostle wished to have it understood that the rejection of God's ancient people was not entire, so here he teaches that this rejection is not final." And Haldane says: "Having proved that God had not cast away His people, by referring to the fact that even then a remnant, according to the election of grace, was preserved, Paul supports his denial of their rejection by the consideration that in process of time the whole nation shall be restored. This restoration, as has been already remarked, forms the subject of nearly the whole remainder of the chapter." And again: "*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?* . . . the Apostles own question. . . naturally springs out of the declaration made in the four preceding verses concerning the blindness of those called 'the rest,' in contradistinction to the remnant comprehended in the election. The question is, 'Has the great body of the Jewish nation stumbled, that they should fall forever, and is this the purpose of their fall?' Paul replies with a strong negative. Nothing was further from the purpose of God with respect to His ancient people. They had stumbled. . . but still it was but a temporary stumbling, from which the nation will finally recover."

Some of those branches were broken off; they represent ethnic Jews. Other branches were grafted in among the others, taken from wild olives; they represent the Gentiles. And Paul's urging his Gentile audience not to be arrogant; because, first of all, they're growing as branches on a Jewish tree, not the other way around (vv17-18). And secondly, they're grafted into this tree by faith, and so they ought to fear; for if God didn't spare the natural branches—but cut them off for their unbelief—then He won't spare us either (vv19-22). Paul then closes this section by coming back to the Jews; and this is what he says: Not only is the Lord able to cut off Gentile branches because of their unbelief; He's also able to graft the natural ones back in. For, as Paul tells us, if the wild branches can be grafted in “contrary to nature,” how much more “will the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?” (vv23-24).<sup>4</sup>

#### ROMANS 11:11-24: WHAT WE LEARN FROM ISRAEL'S HARDENING

	THE SUBJECT OF THE TEXT	THE SUBSTANCE OF THE TEXT
ROMANS 11:11-16	<i>The design</i> in Israel's hardening	Israel didn't stumble so as to fall—but <i>that the Gentiles might be saved</i>
ROMANS 11:17-24	<i>The lesson</i> in Israel's hardening	God can cut off the wild branches—or <i>graft back in the natural ones</i>

If Paul had stopped there, we would've been left with the impression that God is very able to graft the Jewish people back into the new covenant church. But we would have been left wondering whether or not that was something God was actually going to do. Thankfully, Paul *doesn't* stop there. Right after he tells us in verses 23-24 that God is able to graft the natural branches back into their own tree, this is what Paul says in Romans 11:25-26: “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; *and so all Israel will be saved. . .*” Before we unpack what Paul is saying here, we need to address two other misguided views of this passage: First, there are some who contend that though Paul is using the term “Israel” in verse 25 to speak of ethnic Jews, he's using that same term “Israel” in verse 26 [IE, “all Israel”] to speak of *mystical Israel*; that is, God's people as a whole, made up of both Jew and Gentile alike. This interpretation requires a bit of exegetical gymnastics; changing “until” to “in order that;” so that the passage now says: “a measure of hardening has happened to the Jews *in order that* the fullness of the Gentiles might come in; that all God's people, Jew and Gentile, will be saved.” Aside from having to depart from the plain reading of the text, this interpretation falls short because of *the context of the passage*. As one writer points out: “In these three chapters (Romans 9-11) the term 'Israel' occurs no less than eleven times. And in the preceding ten cases it refers indisputably to the Jews, in contrast with the Gentiles. What compelling reason can there be. . .to accept another meaning here?” And not only is the context *before* verse 26 compelling; but even immediately *afterwards*, in verse 28, Paul's still talking about the Jews. This view also falls short because of *the purpose of the passage*. Remember, the whole reason Paul is writing all this is to humble the Gentiles (vv18,25); but the notion that God had hardened the Jews in order to make way for the Gentiles would actually serve to do the opposite—kindling their pride all the more. A second view of this passage understands “all Israel” in verse 26 as indeed referring to the Jews, but specifically, to the small remnant of elect Jews that God would preserve throughout time. This view also requires some exegetical gymnastics; but this time it involves changing “and so” to “nevertheless” in verse 26; so that the passage reads: “a measure of hardening has indeed happened to the Jews until the very end; *nevertheless*, all of God's elect from among the Jews will be saved.” Aside from having to depart, once again, from the plain reading of the text, this view also falls short; this time, because of

4 As Hodge says again on Romans 11:11: “The particle *hina*, “that,” here as usually, expresses design. Have the Jews stumbled, in order that they should fall? . . .Was it the design of God, in permitting the stumbling of the Jews, that they should finally perish? In other words, was their rejection designed to be a permanent casting them out of the kingdom of Christ?” (Paul supplies the obvious answer here: *May it never be!*). And Haldane says: “God had a double purpose in [Israel's hardening]. His design in their stumbling was not that they should fall forever, but rather that through their fall salvation should come to the Gentiles, and that, through this, the nation of Israel might ultimately receive the Messiah.” Blake writes: “[The Apostle limits] this doctrine of [the Jews'] rejection with a double caution: I. That it was not total; II. That it was not final. . .He speaks to the Gentiles, and to take down their [exaltation] over the Jews, he shows that this rejection of theirs is not final. And this, as the former, is: 1) *Asserted*, verse 11: 'I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? (namely, irrecoverably fall) God forbid.' 2) *Proved* by giving account of a twofold end of this rejection of the Jews: A) The call of the Gentiles, verse 12: 'But rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for the provoke them to jealousy.' B) A more glorious return of the Jews, in emulation of the Gentiles, verse 12: 'Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?' Hereupon he falls upon a large discourse of his zeal toward them, and their re-ingrafting (verses 13-15). . .” On verses 17-24, Roberts says: “The Jews, the *natural branches* of the *good olive-tree*, were some of them first broken off through unbelief; before the Gentiles, the *branches of the olive-tree wild by nature*, were grafted in, in their stead by faith (their fall being the Gentiles' rise, their diminution the riches of the Gentiles, and their casting away the reconciling of the world). Nor were the Jews totally and finally broken off, but only *till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*, that the salvation of the Gentiles may provoke the Jews to jealousy, and at last all Israel may be saved.” (Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p1298).

*the subject of the passage.* In verse 25, Paul describes what he's about to share with us as a profound mystery; but is there really anything “mysterious” about the fact that God is saving a small number of elect Jews? This view also falls short because it fails to fit with *the logic of the passage.* There's a clear connection between verse 25 and what Paul had said just prior to that; and in verses 23-24, Paul isn't talking about preserving the branches that remain—but grafting back in the ones which were cut off.<sup>5</sup>

#### EXAMINING THE TWO MISTAKEN VIEWS OF ROMANS 11:25-26

	TAKE ROMANS 11:25 AS SAYING	TAKE “ALL ISRAEL” AS MEANING
MYSTICAL “ISRAEL”	The Jews were hardened <i>so as the Gentiles will be saved</i>	God's elect people, Jew and Gentile alike
REMNANT of ISRAEL	The Jews were hardened <i>and yet their elect will be saved</i>	Small number of elect Jews through time

In verses 23-24, Paul had spoken of *the possibility* of Israel as a nation being grafted back in to God's new covenant church. In verses 25-26, he's declaring *the certainty* of it. Way back in verse 11, Paul had asked if God was finished with Israel; and he had answered with an emphatic, *no*: “May it never be!” But as it's often the case with Paul, he got a bit sidetracked along the way as he sought to provide a fuller explanation. In verses 11-16, he felt the need to explain that even Israel's present hardening is indeed part of God's sovereign design to extend salvation to the nations. And then in verses 17-24, having just spoken of God's plan to include the nations, Paul felt the need to address us as Gentiles; reminding us that we've been grafted into a Jewish tree, and we're only here by faith; and that God is not only able to cut off the wild branches because of unbelief—but also to graft the natural ones back in again. This is the context of Paul's words in Romans 11:25-26: “*For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved. . .*” The “partial hardening” is the present situation among ethnic Jews; it's partial because

<sup>5</sup> The quote about the context of “Israel” in Romans 11 is from Iain Murray's, *The Puritan Hope*, pp62-63. Calvin was, in fact, a proponent of the *Mystical Israel* view, as is evident from his commentary on Romans 11:25. The *Remnant of Israel* view, as Iain Murray explains, “was apparently common in the early seventeenth century, but it was almost uniformly rejected by English and Scottish exegetes of the Puritan school.” (p64). Murray himself expositis much of Romans 11 in a helpful way (cf. pp59-72). Hodge says: “1) Many understand the apostle as not predicting any remarkable future conversion of the Jewish nation, but merely declaring that the hardening or blinding of the nation, was not such as to prevent many Jews entering the Christian church, as long as the Gentiles continued to come in. Thus all the true Israel, embracing Jews as well as Gentiles, should ultimately be saved. 2) The second general view supposes the apostle, on the contrary, to predict a great and general conversion of the Jewish people, which should take place when the fullness of the Gentiles had been brought in, and that then, and not till then, those prophecies should be fully accomplished which speak of the salvation of Israel. The former of these views was presented, in different forms, by the great body of the authors who lived about the time of the Reformation; who were led by the extravagancies of the Millenarians, who built much on this passage, to explain away its prophetic character almost entirely. . .The second view has been the one generally received in every age of the church, with the exception of the period just referred to.” (Romans 11:25). And Witsius says: “From what we have said before, it appears, that they depart from the apostle's meaning, who, by *all Israel*, understand the *mystical Israel*, or the people of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, without admitting the conversion of the whole Jewish nation to Christ, in the sense we have mentioned. Notwithstanding this may be confirmed by the following arguments: 1) *First*: The apostle speaks of that Israel, to whom he ascribes his own pedigree (verse 1) whom he calls his flesh, that is, his kindred (verse 14) and the natural branches (verse 21) whom he constantly distinguishes from the Gentiles; to whom he testifies, blindness is happened. All this is applicable to Israel properly so called. 2) *Secondly*: He lays before us a mystery; but it was no mystery that a very few Jews were converted to Christ together with the Gentiles; for we have daily instances of that. 3) *Thirdly*: He reminds the Gentiles not to exult over, or despise the Jews, from this argument, that, as they themselves were now taken in among the people of God, so, in like manner, the Jews were in due time to be taken in again. But if the apostle meant, that the body of the Jewish nation was to continue in their hardness; and but a few of them to be saved, who, joined to the Gentiles, should form a mystical Israel, the whole of that discourse would be more adapted to the commendation of the Gentiles than of the Israelites; and encourage rather than repress the pride of the Gentiles. 4) *Fourthly*: As the fall and diminishing of Israel (verse 12) and their casting away (verse 15) are to be understood; so likewise the receiving and saving them; for here the rules of a just opposition must be observed. But the fall, diminishing, and casting away of Israel are to be understood of the generality of the Jewish nation; therefore the receiving and saving of Israel in like manner.” (V2, pp414-15). And the *ESV Study Bible* provides this helpful summary: “Various interpreters have claimed that Paul is speaking of: 1) the salvation of the church of Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, throughout history; or 2) the saving of a remnant of Jews throughout history; or 3) the salvation of the end-time generation of the Jewish people in the future. The first view is unlikely since throughout chapters 9-11 Israel and Gentiles are distinct ethnic entities. Furthermore, in 11:25 Israel refers to ethnic Israel, and it is difficult to see how the referent could suddenly change in verse 26. Finally, verse 28 indicates that ethnic Israel is still distinguished from the Gentiles, for ‘they’ in verse 28 clearly refers to ethnic Israel. The third view, that Paul refers to the salvation of Israel at the end of history, seems most likely because: 1) it fits with the promises of God's future work in verses 12 and 15; 2) it is difficult to see how the salvation of a remnant of Jews all through history would qualify as a mystery; 3) the future salvation of ethnic Israel at the end of history accords with the climactic character of this passage; and 4) it demonstrates finally and fully how God is faithful to fulfill his saving promises to his people (9:6). ‘All Israel does not necessarily refer to every single Jewish person but to a very large number, at least the majority of Jews.’ (from the *ESV Study Bible* on Romans 11:26).

God still has His remnant among them, even now; but it's the majority who are hardened. However, as Paul tells us, this hardening that has happened to Israel, will only continue “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. . .” at which point, “all Israel will be saved.” In other words, presently, God is indeed at work primarily among the Gentiles; but there is a future time coming when “the fullness of the Gentiles” will be reached. And Paul's telling us that when that happens, “all Israel will be saved.” Who is “all Israel”? It's the same Israel he's been talking about over the course of Romans 9-11; it's ethnic Jews as a whole; corporately; as a nation. Presently, there's a remnant of Jews who have come to faith in Christ, but by and large, Israel as a nation has rejected Him. Well, just as Israel as a nation has rejected Him until now—Paul's telling us—Israel as a nation will return to Him once again. Paul's not saying that every Jew who has ever lived will ultimately be saved; he's not talking about some kind of universal salvation for the Jews—but rather—that there's a time coming when ethnic Jews will repent of their sins, return to the Lord, and put their faith in Christ. Paul's also not telling us that when this happens, every single Jew will be brought to salvation. But just as by and large, the Jewish nation has rejected their Messiah; the time is coming that by and large, the Jewish nation will turn back to Him.<sup>6</sup>

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6 As Witsius notes: “We may reckon among the benefits of the New Testament the restoration of the Israelites, who were formerly rejected, and the bringing them back to the communion of God in Christ. Paul has unfolded this mystery to the Gentiles, Romans 11:25-27. . . On this place observe, 1) *First*: That the apostle here explains some *mystery*; that is, a secret thing, not known but by revelation, and taken notice of by few, and happening beyond the expectation and judgment of reason; [in sum], the whole method and manner of executing which, lies in a great measure concealed. . . 2) *Secondly*: That it is the interest of the Gentiles to be acquainted with this mystery, to prevent their entertaining higher thoughts concerning themselves, and lower concerning the Israelites. . . 3) *Thirdly*: The apostle here speaks of the people of Israel, not figuratively but properly so called; who were at this time blind, obdurate, stupid, and hardened, of which [in] verse 7 Isaiah foretold this judgment of God against Israel at large [cf. Isaiah 29:10-11]. . . In short, this is that forlorn condition of the blinded nation of the Jews, which taking its rise in the apostles' time, continues to this our day. 4) *Fourthly*: That this blindness is *in part* happened to Israel. The whole nation, from its first origin even to the end of the world, is considered as one whole; a certain part of which are those, who either have, or now do, or hereafter shall live in the days of the wrath and indignation of God; blindness has seized that part only. 5) *Fifthly*: That blindness is to continue upon them no longer, than till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. . . Which indeed, began to be done by the apostles and their fellow-laborers; but could not be done perfectly. . . This therefore still remains to be done successively. . . The offer of grace was first made to the Israelites. When they refused it, it was sent to the Gentiles; but when the fulness of them shall be brought in, it will be again given to the Israelites. . . 6) *Sixthly*: That when the fulness of the Gentiles is brought in, all Israel shall be saved; that is, as our Dutch commentators well observe, not a few, but a very great number, and in a manner the whole Jewish nation, in a full body.” (Witsius, V2, pp413-14). And Hodge writes: “The second general view supposes the apostle. . . to predict a great and general conversion of the Jewish people, which should take place when the fullness of the Gentiles had been brought in, and that then, and not till then, those prophecies should be fully accomplished which speak of the salvation of Israel. . . [This] second view has been the one generally received in every age of the church. . . That it is the correct interpretation, appears evident for the following reasons: [1] The whole context and drift of the apostle's discourse is in its favor. In the preceding part of the chapter, Paul, in the plainest terms, had taught that the conversion of the Jews was a probable event, and that it would be in the highest degree beneficial and glorious for the whole world. . . [2] It is evident that Paul meant to say, that the Jews were to be restored in the sense in which they were then rejected. They were then rejected not merely as individuals, but as a community, and therefore are to be restored as a community; see verses 11,15. . . [3] It is plain from this and other parts of the discourse, that Paul refers to a great event; something which should attract universal attention. . . [4] The gradual conversion of a few Jews is no mystery, in the scriptural sense of the word. . . [5] The words, *all Israel*, in the next verse, cannot, as the first interpretation mentioned above would require, be understood of the *spiritual* Israel; because the word is just before used in a different sense, 'blindness in part has happened unto Israel'. . . [6] The words [*akhri's hou*] correctly rendered in our version, *until*, cannot, so consistently with usage, be translated, *as long as*, or *so that*, followed as they are here by the aorist subjunctive; see Revelation 15:8; 17:17; compare Hebrews 3:13. . . [7] The following verses seem to require this interpretation. The result contemplated is one which shall be a full accomplishment of those prophecies which predicted the salvation of the Jews. The reason given in verses 28-29, for the event to which Paul refers, is the unchangeableness of God's purposes and covenant. . . From all these considerations, it seems obvious that Paul intended here to predict that the time would come when the Jews, as a body, should be converted unto the Lord. . .” (Hodge on Romans 11:25). Haldane notes on Romans 11:25: “Having in the two preceding verses exhibited first the *possibility*, and next the *probability*, of the restoration of the Jews, according to the order of God's providence, the Apostle, in this and the following verses, down to the 28<sup>th</sup>, goes on to prove *the certainty* of the future conversion and restoration of Israel. He here addresses the Gentiles as his brethren, thus expressing his affection for them, and stimulates their attention, by declaring that he was about the reveal to them a mystery—a thing hitherto hidden or unknown. The restoration of the Jews is called a mystery, for though declared in the Scriptures, it was not understood. And in this mystery there were two parts, both of which are here unfolded; first, that blindness is happened to Israel in part only; and, secondly, that this blindness should continue till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. This mystery was opened to prevent the Gentiles from being wise in their own conceits, that is, from being puffed up on account of the preference they now enjoyed.” And again on verse 26: “Here the Apostle further unfolds the mystery of which he would not have his brethren to be ignorant. In the foregoing verse he had declared that blindness had come upon Israel—that blindness which he had before shown was inflicted on part of the Jewish nation by the judgment of God (verses 8-10), which would continue till a certain period was accomplished. He now declares that at that period all Israel shall be saved. The rejection of Israel has been general, but at no period universal. This rejection is to continue till the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in. Then the people of Israel, as a body, shall be brought to the faith of the Gospel.” Matthew Henry writes: “The Jews shall continue in blindness, till God has performed his whole work among the Gentiles, and then their turn will come next to be remembered. This was the purpose and ordination of God, for wise and holy ends; things should not be ripe for the

THE JEWS' RESTORATION TO CHRIST *WILL BE CORPORATE*: ROMANS 11:25-26

THE PRESENT	Israel as a nation has rejected Christ	Only a small number of Jews are saved	The harvesting of Gentiles
THE PROMISE	Israel as a nation will embrace Him	Only a small number of Jews won't be	A re-harvesting of the Jews

This brings us back to verses 11-16, where we'll close our study of this passage. Notice what Paul says in verses 12 and 15 as he talks about Israel's hardening and restoration: "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! . . . For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" What Paul says here is important, first of all, because it serves as a confirmation of our interpretation of verses 25-26. Notice that it's the very group of people who had *rebelled* that are now being *received*; it's the same ones who had *rejected* the Lord that are now being *readmitted*. For just as it was the Jewish nation, as a whole, that stumbled and became hardened; it's the Jewish nation, as a whole, that will, one day, return and be restored. Indeed, the partial hardening that's come upon ethnic Israel isn't the end of the story. But notice, secondly, that their restoration isn't the end of the story, either. Look at the logic that Paul's using in verses 12 and 15: If Israel's *rebellion* led to riches for the world—then how much more their *reception*? And if Israel's rejection led to reconciliation for the world—then what will their acceptance be but *life from the dead*? Do you see what Paul's saying? Not only is God going to restore the Jews—but when He does so—it's going to unleash unprecedented blessing upon the nations *all over again*; to such an extent that the work God is doing now among the nations will only pale in comparison. Paul is talking about conversions; he's talking about awakening; he's talking about revival blessings that are so rich, we can only dream about them. But how does he know all this? We're given a hint in verses 26-27, where Paul quotes a passage from Isaiah, applying it to the restoration of the Jews. The passage comes from the very end of *Isaiah 59*, and according to Paul, it describes the corporate repentance of Israel as a nation. But we shouldn't stop reading there, because *Isaiah 60* is the amazing account of what will transpire afterwards: "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you. . . A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come. . . All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up with acceptance on My altar, and I shall glorify My glorious house." (Isaiah 60:3-7). The names are significant; for *Midian*, *Sheba*, and *Ephah* were all sons of Abraham's concubine Keturah; whom he sent away to the east (Genesis 25:1-6). Do these make up the vast populations of Buddhists and Hindus living in Asia? Further, Kedar and Nebaioth were the sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-13); *Nebaioth* was his firstborn, yet Muslim tradition traces the ancestry of their prophet to Adnan, who is claimed to be a descendant of *Kedar*. Could it be that there are certain breakthroughs in our missional and evangelistic efforts that will only come following the time of the restoration of the Jews? It's difficult to know. But what is certain is that those days will be so full of blessing and outpouring, that Paul can only describe them as "life from the dead. . ."<sup>7</sup>

Jews' conversion till the church was replenished with the Gentiles, that it might appear that God's taking them again was not because he had need of them, but of his own free grace. . . *All Israel shall be saved*, verse 26. *He will have mercy upon all*, verse 32. Not every individual person, but the body of the people. Not that ever they should be restored to their covenant of peculiarity again, to have their priesthood, and temple, and ceremonies again (an end is put to all those things); but they should be brought to believe in Christ the true Messiah whom they crucified, and be incorporated in the Christian church, and become one sheep-fold with the Gentiles under Christ the great Shepherd." (Haldane on Romans 11:26). And Gill affirms: "*And so all Israel shall be saved*: Meaning not the mystical spiritual Israel of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, who shall appear to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, when all God's elect among the latter are gathered in, which is the sense many give into; but the people of the Jews, the generality of them, the body of that nation, called 'the fulness' of them (Romans 11:12), and relates to the latter day, when a nation of them shall be born again at once; when, their number being as the sand of the sea, they shall come up out of the lands where they are dispersed, and appoint them one head, Christ, and great shall be the day of Jezreel; when they as a body, even the far greater part of them that shall be in being, shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; shall acknowledge Jesus to be the true Messiah, and shall look to him, believe on him, and be saved by him from wrath to come." (Romans 11:26). And Moo likewise concludes: "Israel's present hostility toward God, manifested in her general refusal of the gospel (cf. 9:30-10:21), is itself part of God's plan, for it is the result of God's act of hardening. . . But this hardening is both limited (partially' in v25b; cf. 11:3-7) and temporary ('until' in v25b), designed both to allow Gentiles to 'come in' (vv25b, 30; cf. 11:11-15) and to stimulate Israel herself to repentance (v31; cf. 11:11). . . [God's] faithfulness [to Israel] presently takes the form of a preservation of a remnant (11:3-6). But in the future God's unwavering commitment to Israel will be spectacularly revealed in the salvation of the nation as a whole (v26a)." (Moo, *Romans*, p713).

7 Of the phrase "life from the dead" in Romans 11:15, Witsius writes: "Lastly, to this restoration of Israel shall be joined the riches of the whole church, and as it were, life from the dead [cf. Romans 11:12,15]. . . The apostle intimates, that much greater and more extensive benefits shall redound to the Christian church from the fulness and restoration of the Jews, than did to the Gentiles, from their fall and diminution; greater, I say, *intensively*, or with respect to degrees, and larger with respect to *extent*. As to the intensiveness or degrees, it is supposed, that, about the time of the conversion of the Jews, the Gentile world will be like a dead person, in a manner almost as Christ describes the church of Sardis

THE JEWS' RESTORATION TO CHRIST WILL BE GLORIOUS: ROMANS 11:11-16

THE PRESENT	Israel's Rejection	<i>A blessing for the nations</i>	Did result in "riches for the world...riches for the Gentiles"
THE PROMISE	Israel's Reception		Will result in unprecedented time of "life from the dead"

**B) RECOLLECTING the PAST:** As we've seen, Scripture explicitly testifies to these things. But the restoration of ethnic Israel isn't only something that's *foretold* in passages such as Romans 11; it's also something that's *fore-pictured* throughout the Old Testament Scriptures: Think about THE STORY OF JOSEPH. His own kinsman hated him and were jealous of him, and so they sold him away into the hands of Gentile foreigners; and they thought they had done away with him. But even as Joseph's brothers were plotting against him for evil—God was plotting for the salvation of the world. For while they tried to pretend he was dead, Joseph was very much alive; and indeed, he had become Prince in a foreign land, among a foreign people. For all authority was given to him, and a people who did not know him gladly bowed the knee to him; and while his brothers tried to forget about him, Joseph was literally off, saving the world. For a great famine had swept across the whole earth; and even the land of Israel had nothing to eat; indeed, the only place there was bread was where Joseph was, among the Gentiles. And truly, the whole reason Joseph's brothers in Israel were starving while the nations were feasting on bread, was that they had forsaken their brother, who was the only source of bread. And though Joseph could have sent for them during this time; yet he chose to hide himself in Egypt—that is —*until the time came when his brothers returned to him*. We're well acquainted with the story now, but before this actually happened, it would have been shocking to us. We wouldn't have expected it. We would have thought the story would end here, with Joseph as the exalted Prince of the Gentiles; but it doesn't; because God was purposing not only to save the world—but also to reconcile Joseph's brothers to himself. And so, a time came during the course of the famine that Joseph's own kinsmen according to the flesh also came, along with the other nations, to where he was in Egypt. And when the right moment came, Joseph revealed himself to them; and they acknowledged their iniquity; and they were reconciled to him; and indeed, as a result, *all Israel* came down to live with him in Egypt.

SEEING THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS IN THE STORY OF JOSEPH

	REJECTION	EXALTATION	RESTORATION
JOSEPH IN GENESIS	Joseph's kinsman rejected him	He was made prince over all Egypt	His kinsman did return to him
ISRAEL IN ROMANS	The Jews have rejected Christ	Salvation has come to the Gentiles	Israel will yet repent and return

(Revelation 3:1-2), namely, both that light of saving knowledge, and that fervent piety, and that lively and vigorous simplicity of ancient Christianity, will, in a course of years, be very much impaired. . .but upon the restoration of the Jews, these will suddenly arise, as out of the grave; a new light will shine upon them, a new zeal be kindled up; the life of Christ be again manifested in his mystical body, more lively, perhaps, and vigorous than ever. Then, doubtless, many Scripture prophecies will after their accomplishment, be better understood, and such as now appear dark riddles, shall then be found to contain a most distinct description of facts; many candles joined together give a greater light; a new fire laid near another, gives a greater heat. And such will the accession of the Jews be to the church of the Gentiles." (V2, p419). And again: "And not only so, but also many nations, among whom the name of Christ had long before been forgotten, shall be seen to flock again to the standard of salvation then erected. For there is a certain fulness of the Gentiles, to be gathered together by the successive preaching of the gospel, which goes *before* the restoration of Israel, of which verse 25 [speaks], and another richness of the Gentiles, that comes *after* the recovery of Israel. For, while the gospel, for many ages, was published now to this, then to that nation, others gradually departed from Christ; but when the fulness of the Jews is come, it is altogether probable, that these nations will in great numbers, return to Christ. . .Agreeably to which James has said [in] Acts 15:15-17, 'And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doth all these things.' The reparation of the fallen tabernacle of David signifies the restoration of true and spiritual worship among the Israelites. And when that shall come to pass, the rest of mankind, who never gave up their names to Christ, and the nations, upon whom his name was formerly called, but who, by their thoughtlessness, lost the benefit of the gospel, will then with emulation seek the Lord. And what is more evident than that prophecy in Isaiah? The prophet, [in] chapter 59:20-21, having foretold the restoration of Israel according to the apostle's commentary, immediately, [in] chapter 60:1, exclaims, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee.' [And] verse 3,' and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising,' etc. Moreover, the riches of the church at that time are described [in] verse 17, 'for brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron'; the most magnificent words to the same purpose, follow these. . .We have not indeed, the least doubt, that there are many prophecies both in the Old and New Testament to this purpose, the full meaning of which we ardently pray the supreme Being may teach his people by the event, the only undoubted interpreter of prophecies." (V2, pp419-21). And John Murray notes on Romans 11:12: "the fullness of Israel will involve for the Gentiles a much greater enjoyment of gospel blessing than that occasioned by Israel's unbelief. Thus here awaits the Gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such, gospel blessing far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel's apostasy, and this unprecedented enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate with that of their earlier disobedience."

And think back again to ISRAEL'S EXILE AND RESTORATION. When God had cast Israel out of their land, it seemed that this was truly the end. God had finally had enough, and now it was time for judgment. Everything was torn away from them: The Davidic king was dethroned; the temple was burned to the ground; and they themselves were cast away from the land that God had promised to their forefathers. God was done with them forever. At least, *so it seemed*. But He wasn't done with them forever. It wasn't true. This wasn't the end of the story for Israel; for, as the prophets declared, though God was sending judgment, He would "not execute a complete destruction" (Jeremiah 4:27) upon them, but preserve "a remnant within them" (Isaiah 10:20-21). Indeed, *God would preserve a remnant*. And not only that, but the prophets went on to proclaim that a day was coming when God would bring Israel back into the land once again. And so, not only would the Lord spare a remnant; *He would also grant restoration*. In other words: *the exile wouldn't be total*, for God would preserve a remnant; and *the exile wouldn't be final*, for though Israel had been cut off from the land, God was going to graft them back in once again. Does this sound familiar? It's exactly what Paul had just told us about ethnic Israel in Romans 11. Have they been hardened? Yes. But their hardening *isn't total*, for God is preserving a remnant among them. Have they been cut off as branches? Yes. But *it's not the final word*, for God will cause them to return once again. When Israel was cast away to Babylon, they were like dead men in their graves. Their situation was so hopeless they were likened to corpses buried in the ground. Today, Israel's situation is no better; but we serve a God who *raises the dead*.<sup>8</sup>

SEEING THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS IN THE EXILE OF ISRAEL

	WHAT IT SEEMS	WHAT GOD SAYS	
ISRAEL BANISHED	This must be the end	Israel's exile wouldn't be final	He will bring them back to the land yet again
ISRAEL HARDENED		Israel's hardening won't be final	He will bring them back to himself yet again

*C) ANTICIPATING the FUTURE:* Paul brings Romans 11 to a close with these words: "For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all." (verses 30-32). God's design is to show mercy; and just as He showed mercy to us as Gentiles, when we were lost in our rebellion and sin; so too, Paul's telling us, God is purposing to do the very same for ethnic Jews. Don't misunderstand what we're saying. It's not that God is going to revert to the old covenant administration when He gathers Israel back to himself. We're not saying that ethnic Jews will return to the physical land of Israel; and we're certainly not saying that the physical temple will be rebuilt, or that this will usher in some kind of earthly, millennial kingdom. We're simply affirming the truth that Scripture is here declaring, that a day is coming when Israel as a nation will again return to the Lord.

God isn't finished with Israel. And shouldn't that excite our hearts? There's a bright future for them in the new covenant. We ought to be brought to awe and worship, that our God is able and that He's purposed to do such a thing. But it should also drive us back to prayer; because God isn't going to do this in a vacuum. For just as the Lord has predestined ends; He's also predestined the means to bring about those ends; and in particular, God has predestined prayer as the means by which we call upon Him to do what we cannot do; and to do what indeed He himself has purposed and promised to do. Friends, it would be good to remember that our Jewish brothers in the days of the old covenant often came before God interceding for us, the Gentiles, when we were outsiders. Can we not do the same for them? May the Lord Jesus gather His fold, both of Jew and Gentile; and bring us safely home to His heavenly kingdom: "*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*"

<sup>8</sup> This parallel isn't original. Francis Roberts put it this way: "The Jews' captivity and dead hopeless condition in Babylon, as also their strange resurrection out of their graves there by a wonderful deliverance; seem to shadow out the spiritual bondage and misery of the Jews during all the time of their breaking off from Christ by unbelief, and also of their restoration, and re-implantation of them again into Christ by faith, *which shall be as life from the dead*. And Paul [quoting] Isaiah, which had immediate reference to the captive Jews in Babylon, Isaiah 59:20-21, interprets and applies it mediately to the Jews calling and re-ingrafting into Christ, after the Gentiles fulness should be come in (Romans 11:25-27); which notably insinuates to us, that the Jews misery in, and recovery out of Babylon, were types of their future misery in being broken off from Christ by unbelief, and of their happy reviving and being re-ingrafted into Christ by faith. After which restoration of the Jews by their conversion, all these promised blessings of God's tabernacle, Spirit, Word, and public ministry shall be continued unto them, but much more spiritually till the end of the world." (p1198; cf. p1298).