

Romans 9... 10... 11

These verses address the relationship that exists between the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations today.

Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,

When Paul uses the word "Gentiles" in Romans eleven, he is referring to all the peoples on earth who are not the physical descendants of Abraham. He is *not* talking only about Gentile believers in the Church at Rome.

Notice he says "I am an apostle to the Gentiles." He was sent with the Gospel to all the Gentile world, and it is to all Gentiles that these verses refer. As we will see, just as within the apostate nation of Israel there was a believing remnant, so among the Gentile nations there are those who believe and those who remain unbelievers. It will become important at about verse twenty-one to remember this distinction.

Romans 11:14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

In the Gospels Jesus offered the nation of Israel God's fullness. In the opening chapters of the Book of Acts, the disciples offered the nation of Israel God's fullness. Israel rejected Christ and they rejected Christians. The Book of Acts ends with Paul saying to the nation of Israel, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"¹

Gentiles who receive the Gospel enter into the fullness of a relationship with God that was first offered to the nation of Israel.

Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

¹Acts 28:28

When the nation of Israel rejected the Gospel, the offer of salvation went out to all nations everywhere, and to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. The Gospel is the message that God has reconciled all men to Himself at the Cross of Jesus Christ and can save all who come to Him by grace through faith.

If such a wondrous result followed Israel's rejection of Jesus, imagine the glorious future for all nations on earth when Israel at last receives the Lord! It will be like a "resurrection from the dead" in the sense that all nations, Jew and Gentile, will be alive unto God.

Paul launches into two metaphors: The lump of dough and the olive tree.

The Lump Of Dough is the nation of Israel in relation to Abraham and the other patriarchs.

Romans 11:16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy;

This refers to Numbers 15:17-21. The first part of the dough was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. Paul is saying that God accepted Abraham and the other patriarchs and must therefore accept the whole nation of Israel as His own. Don't let the word "holy" confuse you. It does not mean "saved" in this context. It means "set apart for God's purposes and use." Paul is not saying that individual Jews are all automatically saved before God. That would contradict everything he has taught in Romans and elsewhere. He is saying that the nation of Israel belongs to Him, it is set apart for His purposes and use, because of His covenants with Abraham and the other patriarchs. The nation of Israel - the lump - even in her apostasy and sin, is blessed to remain in God's plan on account of His own unconditional promises to Abraham and the others - the "firstfruits."

The Olive Tree And Its Branches describes the relationship between the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations in the present age in which we live.

Romans 11:16 ...and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Both Jewish and Gentile commentators agree that the "root" is Abraham and the patriarchs. It was through Abraham and the patriarchs that "all the nations of the world would be blessed." The fullness of a relationship with the living God has its origins in Abraham, for Jews and Gentiles alike. Like sap flowing out to branches, the life is from the root.

Again you read the word "holy." Again it does not mean "saved," but simply "set apart." Because of God's promises to Abraham and the others, the nation of Israel as a whole was set apart to receive the fullness of God.

Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches were broken off...

The original branches of the olive tree are the nation of Israel. Some of the branches were broken off by unbelief, as you read in verse twenty. In other words, all of the nation of Israel could have received God's fullness through His promises to Abraham, but because of unbelief many did not.

Romans 11:17 ...and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

"You" refers to all the Gentile nations of the world. When the nation of Israel rejected God's fullness through Jesus Christ, that message went out to all the Gentile nations of the world. God sees the whole world as grafted in to the tree. The whole world, every man everywhere, can potentially receive of God's fullness. They can receive by believing.

Romans 11:18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

Romans 11:19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

Romans 11:20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

Romans 11:21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

These verse are *not* addressing whether or not a Christian can forfeit his or her salvation. Here is their meaning in their context:

The entire nation of Israel was blessed by its relationship to Abraham. Only those who believed God were saved by grace through faith and enjoyed God's fullness - the fullness of His life flowing in and through them like sap through the branches. Those who remained in unbelief are like dead branches which, having no life, are removed from the tree.

Now the Gentile nations of the world, all of them, have been grafted on to the tree. All the nations of the world are blessed by their relationship to Abraham. Only those who believe God are saved by grace through faith and enjoy God's fullness - the fullness of His life flowing in and through them like sap through the branches. Those who remain in unbelief are like dead branches which, having no life, are removed from the tree.

You see this in our own Gentile nation, the United States. Our whole nation is blessed by God, but only those who believe enjoy God's fullness.

Romans 11:22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

This is a broad statement to everyone in the world who hears the Gospel. It is a call to believe God by faith and to share in His life.

Otherwise you will eventually be "cut off" - you will perish in your sinful unbelief.

Romans 11:23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Romans 11:24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

"They" are the nation of Israel who will again be grafted in in the Last Days before the Second Coming of the Lord. As we saw previously, "all Israel will be saved."

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Paul calls all of this a "mystery." In the New Testament a mystery is something previously unknown that is now being revealed. This verse reveals God's dealings with men and nations in this age in which we live. He is hardening the nation of Israel in their unbelief and is working instead among the Gentile nations.

What is "the fullness of the Gentiles?" I used to think that it was numeric. I thought that it referred to the full number of Gentiles who would be saved in this age.

While that is true, it is only part of what "fullness" means. You see, you and I share the fullness of God right now; there is nothing lacking in our relationship with God. In John 1:16 you read,

John 1:16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

Fullness refers to the wonderful relationship you have right now with God through Jesus Christ.

When Paul says that "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" he is looking ahead to a time when God will no longer be primarily dealing with Gentile nations. God will return to His dealings with the nation of Israel.

When will that be? It will be when we "come in." I see this as a reference to the Rapture, when Jesus will bring us in to heaven for seven years while He deals with Israel on earth during the Great Tribulation.