

QUESTION 432

In the KJV bible...does the word saved mean the same thing in Romans 9-27 as it does in Romans 11-26?

In the KJV bible...Is the word WORLD in John 3-16 the same as the word WORLD in John 17-9?

ANSWER TO QUESTION 432

Questions of this nature would generally be a waste of time. However, in this case the inquirer said that when these were answered he had more questions. Could it be that he has a plan to disagree with something contained on this website and he believes that he is setting us up for his fatal blow? That may be wrong and I hope it is, but absent this or a similar motive there seems to be little to no reason for such mundane questions. If the assumption is correct it means that our inquirer doesn't have the courage to just come out and straightforwardly defend his belief.

That said, let us begin.

SAVED (Same lemma, same morphology, 11 other passages in the ESV are also the same.)

Rom. 9:27 – noun, future, passive, indicative, third person, singular

Rom. 11:26 – noun, future, passive, indicative, third person, singular

WORLD (Same lemma, different morphology.)

Jn. 3:16 – noun, accusative, singular, masculine (45 other occurrences of this morphology are found in the ESV.)

Jn. 17:9 – noun, genitive, singular, masculine (71 other occurrences of this morphology are found in the ESV.)

Obviously his interest lies in two areas – salvation and the world. Another possible hint to his interest is that premillennialists, especially dispensational premillennialists, apply the Roman passages, especially 11:26 to the end times. I am therefore led to infer that his point is that what this website says about premillennialism and especially about the end times and the conversion of the Jews is all wrong, and our inquirer believes that if the subject words mean the same thing then ThyWordIsTruth.com has made an egregious error. Unfortunately for our inquirer, the fact that two different

verses use the same word has no relevance at all to the doctrine of premillennialism. The words are surrounded by context and context must be considered. The most significant context raised here is Romans 11.¹ The relevant greater context of chapter 11 begins in chapter 9, and it must all be considered to understand chapter 11.

With chapter 9 Paul begins new section that continues to the end of chapter 11. His beginning theme, that the gospel is God's power for man's salvation, has come to an end. His theme has been that it is only through obedience to the gospel² that both Jew and Gentile can be saved. With chapter 9 Paul begins to address questions that arose concerning the Jewish nation. The Jews have played a major role in God's plan. They had had a close and peculiar relationship with God. How then was it possible for them to reject the Messiah? What is their present state and their future destiny? How, if at all, does this affect Christians? Paul answers these questions with special emphasis upon his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. The choosing and election involved is not dealing with man's final salvation, but with the working out of the purpose of God to bestow his salvation upon Jew and Gentile alike, a salvation in Christ that was conceived before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20) and announced to sinful man in the first Messianic prophecy (Gen. 3:15).

In 11:1 Paul begins to address the specific question, "Has God rejected his people" (ESV). He holds himself up as a living example that that is not the case—he is a Jew and he had not been rejected. He quotes Elijah for further proof. Though Elijah thought that he was the only faithful person left, God assured him that there was still a remnant that had not bowed the knee to Baal. He then adds that in the same manner there is "a remnant according to the election of grace."³ Suffice it to say here that many Bible readers fail to distinguish between works by which a man merits salvation and commands that one must obey in order to be saved. It is unfortunate that many

¹ This is not to suggest that there are not other passages in the context of the entire scripture that cannot be true if the doctrine of premillennialism is true. It is simply to say that the passage on which our inquirer relies in Rom. 11 does not touch the doctrine of premillennialism top, side, nor bottom.

² This does not negate faith. Paul knows no faith that is not obedient. His letter to the Romans both begins and ends with that emphasis (1:5, 16:26).

³ There are many sites on this website that discuss the relationship between grace, faith, and works. Perhaps the fullest discussion is found at "sermons, The Certainty of the Promise." To get the message you must hear it all.

religionists either cannot or will not see this distinction. Failing to see this distinction they conclude that a person must do nothing, indeed can do nothing, in order to be saved. A man has no real understanding of either works or grace when he thinks that conditions of forgiveness make salvation a matter of works and not of grace.

In v. 7 Paul begins to sum up his argument concerning God's dealing with Israel. "What then?" That which they (Jews) sought (righteousness before God) they did not find. They did not find it because God hardened their heart. Does this mean that God did not want them to be saved? Let God the Son answer: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matt 23:37)! Their rejection of Christ and their blind devotion to the law was their ruin. Failing to use the law as a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ (Gal. 3:31-29), they were entrapped by their blind adherence to the law. They were caught in a snare.

The next question (v. 11 – "Did they stumble that they might fall?") is answered by Paul's strongest negative. The King James translates it "God forbid"! The English Standard renders it "By no means"! Having demonstrated that the rejection of Israel was never total, he now argues that it was not final. Biblical history demonstrates their rejection of Christ did in fact lead to their climactic end as a nation finalized in A.D. 70. That same history demonstrates that many of them were brought back into God's favor beginning on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts chapter 2. However, the return to Jehovah came on the part of individuals. It was not a national recovery. What was the nature of their fall? Louw-Nida (20.60) defines the Greek word as, "to suffer or experience destruction—'to experience destruction, to be destroyed.'" What was the result of their fall? Here Paul calls their "fall" their "trespass." Clearly sin was involved and must have been the cause of the fall. Their sin led not only to their fall, it also led to salvation for the Gentiles that Paul calls riches for the world⁴ (Gentiles). It provoked jealousy on the part of the Jews. Since the Jews' fall brought riches (salvation) to the Gentiles, Paul asks, "How much more will their full inclusion mean?" As long as the law lasted, Gentiles as such could not have covenant relationship with God. The law stood as a barrier between Jew and

⁴ Recall that this is the second word that our inquirer wanted defined. Here it has the same lemma and morphology as John 17:9.

Gentile, but Christ removed that wall that God might make one new man of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:13-18). The Jews broke the covenant, and it was abolished (Heb. 8:7-9). Jews and Gentiles then stood on equal footing. God's purpose and his promise to Abraham were fulfilled—in Abraham's seed (Christ) all the nations of the earth were blessed. The declaration of that message began at Jerusalem but was to spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles, though he spoke first to the Jews, "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). The jealousy to which the Jews were provoked was jealousy for the Law, not the gospel. Some suggest that the Jews became jealous for the blessings of the gospel and because of that would become Christians. However, that view is neither in line with Paul's argument nor with the effects preaching to the Gentiles had on the Jews. When Paul spoke to a Jewish mob after having been rescued by Roman soldiers, he said, "¹⁷And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; ¹⁸And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. ¹⁹And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: ²⁰And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. ²¹And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21)." These last words sent the Jews into a rage. In Rom. 10:19 Paul quotes a prophecy of this very result (Deut. 32:21):

"They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

The next question – (v. 12 – "Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?" When v. 12 is correctly understood, most of its contents are affirmed or implied in v. 11. However, v. 12 does have one great difference from v. 11 – v. 12 has no verbs. As a result it has no tenses. This certainly dictates that one should be more than cautious before attributing an entirely past or future time to any of its 3 phrases. The first two clauses seem to affirm the connection between the Jews' downfall and the Gentiles' salvation. "Fall" (ESV; "trespasses," NIV84)" is the same Greek word in both verses. While not the same Greek

word, “their loss” (NIV84, “their failure” ESV) in v. 12 serves the same purpose as “to fall” in v. 11. The Greek word (*hēttēma*) for “loss” (“failure”) in any form is used only twice in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 6:7 where it is translated “defeat” (ESV) and in Rom. 11:12 where it is translated “failure” (ESV). This scarcity makes its translation difficult. Some contend that this it has a numerical value, primarily based on their assumption that “fullness,” its corresponding word in the next clause, is numerical. This is incorrect because 1) the Greek does support a numerical rendering, 2) “fullness” should not be understood numerically, and 3) it does not fit the context. Paul is not discussing Israel *per se*. He is discussing the hardened part of Israel. In comparison with the Remnant, it is not few, but many.

The basic meaning of *hēttēma* seems to be “defeat” (Isa. 31:8, *LXX*; 1 Cor. 6:7), but the emphasis seems to be more on the loss imposed on the defeated by the victor (loss of possessions, freedom, etc.). The result of the Jews’ rejection of the promised Messiah, they lost their relationship with God with God as the spiritual blessings of Christ’s kingdom. Paul’s point is that the Jews’ trespass with its consequent loss enabled salvation to come to the Gentiles. “Riches” refers to the spiritual riches of salvation and is equivalent to salvation.

V. 12 adds one other fact – “how much more their fullness!” It is a brief and concise statement. Notice that it has no verb. “How much more” indicates that a comparison is being made between the first two clauses and this clause. Some commentators assume that “riches” is being compared to “more riches,” meaning that if the Jews’ transgression and loss bring riches to the Gentiles, their fullness will bring even greater riches. This assumption misses the mark. In six of its eight New Testament occurrences, the phrase *posō mallon* means “how much more likely it is that.” It usually is part of an argument from the lesser to the greater. This structure harmonizes with the passage. The clause is not an argument from riches to greater riches; rather it asserts that if the Jews’ transgression and loss bring riches, how much more likely it is that the Jews’ fullness brings riches to the Gentiles. This affects not only the understanding of v. 12. It also affects the understanding of v. 15 where “life from the dead” is often urged as the “greater riches.” It is then argued that if the Jews’ sin brought riches, which is understood as salvation, then “greater riches” must be some spectacle greater than salvation such as a great world-wide revival or some end-time event such as the final general resurrection. That assumption evaporates under the light

that *posō mallon* is not speaking of “greater riches” at all. It is further weakened by the absence of any verb, and thus no future tense, in this clause. In the absence of a future tense verb, there is no reason to assert an eschatological event other than a doctrinal bias that is used to force an eisegetical theory upon the scripture.

The final issue in the clause is the meaning or nature of the Jews’ “fullness” (*plērōma*). There are two basic contentions – the quantitative and the qualitative. The quantitative contends that it refers to the “full number” of the Jews. It further contends that *plērōma* is coupled with *hēttēma* (loss,” v. 12, NIV) upon which a numeric interpretation is asserted. To what, then, would this refer? The most common contention is that it refers to a future large-scale conversion of the Jews in contrast to the present remnant. Some expand this contention to include the restoration of the Jews to their original status of god’s chosen people. This is often linked with the establishment of a millennial kingdom in the premillennial sense.

Other quantitative proponents agree that it means “full number,” but they interpret it in a Calvinistic sense to mean the full number of elect Jews as they are gradually converted over the full course or human history.

The qualitative understanding contends that it refers to the Jews’ participation in the “fullness of salvation.” The word as used elsewhere in the New Testament does not refer to “full number” but to “completeness, abundance.” See, John 1:16; Rom. 15:29; Eph. 1:23; Eph. 3:19; Eph. 4:13. Compare the way the verb, *plēroō*, is used in Rom. 15:13-14; Eph. 3:19; 5:18; Phil. 1:11; Col. 2:10. This meaning also fits the context. In v. 12 “fullness” is in contrast with “transgression” and “loss,” both of which refer to the lost state as opposed to salvation. It is an appropriate contrast with “loss” which has no numerical connotation. It merely compares the saved state with the lost state. This meaning also harmonizes with v. 11 that describes a cause and effect relationship – the Jews’ transgression leads to Gentile salvation. Additionally, “their” occurs three times in v. 12 and each time it refers to the Jews – their transgression, their loss, and their fullness. Clearly the latter refers to the Jews’ salvation. There is absolutely nothing in v. 12 (or elsewhere for that matter) that refers to the salvation of the Jews on a national scale or even with their rejection at least numerically speaking. In v. 12 there is no allusion to the number of Jews lost nor, on the other hand, is there any reference to the number of Jews saved. Moreover, there is nothing in v. 12 that projects this conversion of the Jews to some distant future date.

There is nothing in verse 12 that precludes that salvation from occurring at the very time that Paul was writing. In fact, we will see in the next two verses (vv. 13 and 14), that Paul implies that his own ministry is already producing that result. In short, the main point of v. 12 is not about the Jews, but about the Gentiles, *i.e.*, what will happen to the Gentiles as a result of the Jews' unbelief as well as their belief. If some Gentiles are saved as the result of the Jews' rejection of the gospel, there is even more reason to expect Gentiles to be saved as the result of the Jews' acceptance of the gospel.

In vv. 13 and 14 Paul is calling upon the Gentiles to listen closely to what he has said and that which he is about to say. In this entire section Israel has been the main focus while the Gentiles have been only marginally discussed. Paul is now letting them the Gentiles know that he has not forgotten his primary purpose – the apostle to the Gentiles. He wants the Gentiles to know that the Jews are not just a means to an end, the end being the salvation of the Gentiles. He assures them of his concern for the salvation of the Jews (remember Rom. 9:1-5 and 10:1-5). He impresses upon them the truth that what he is saying is significant for the Gentiles and makes him even more zealous in his work with them, but they need to understand that the welfare of the Jews and of the Gentiles is intertwined. Another reason for addressing the Gentiles is that what he has said about Gentile salvation may lead some of them to be arrogant toward the Jews (see v. 20). In the next section (vv. 17-24) Paul is going to show the Gentiles how much they owe the Jews.

Paul says “I make much of my ministry” (NIV). Other translations render “make much” as “magnify” (ESV, RSV, ISV) and “glorify” (ASV). It is from the Greek word *doxazō* that means “to honor, to praise, to glorify.” It is usually used of giving glory to God, and is rarely used of men or anything human (see 8:30; 1 Cor. 12:26; negatively, see Matt. 6:2). Note that Paul does not glorify himself; he glorifies his God-given ministry. Paul glorifies his ministry because it brings Gentiles to faith in Christ, but he knows that his Gentile ministry is an indirect means of bringing his kinsmen in the flesh to that same faith. Their salvation (“fullness,” see v. 12 discussion) has already been implied in vv. 11-12. Paul knows that his ministry will not convert every Jew, but he pursues his ministry “in the hope that” some of the Jews may be saved thereby.

What does Paul say, “some of them”? First, he was speaking of his own ministry. Second he knew from experience that the salvation of every individual Jew would be too much for which to hope. He knew that the Jews of his own generation were too hardened and resistant to the gospel. At the same time he knew they still had free will. Thus, by fulfilling his ministry to the Gentiles he expected “some” of his ethnic brothers to be saved, but not all.

“For” in verse 15 indicates that the verse is explaining something or giving a reason for something that preceded. It may indicate that vv. 13-14 are a parenthesis with v. 15 referring back and picking up especially on v. 12 and repeating it in more specific terms. Others see v. 15 as explaining the last clause in v. 14, *i.e.*, as explaining why Paul is so enthusiastic about his ministry to the Gentiles. It could also refer back to both v. 12 and vv. 13-14, which could be the best understanding. This understanding accomplishes both purposes of these verses. The link between the last of v. 12 and the last of v. 14 is the salvation (fullness, acceptance) of some of the hardened Jews. In v. 15 Paul states why he wants to see as many as possible saved from this group – it is nothing less than “life from the dead.”

Additionally, the form of v. 15 is very close to that of v. 12; if A leads to B, then surely C leads to D. “Their transgression” and “their loss” in v. 12 correspond to “their rejection” in v. 15. In both verses “their” refers to the hardened and unbelieving Jews. But what does “their rejection” mean? The word translated “rejection” (*apobolē*) means “the removal of someone from a particular association—‘rejection, elimination,’” Louw-Nida 34.38). Given the contrast of “rejection” with “acceptance” in v. 15, it is clear that “rejection” refers to a positive act, specifically the removal of the Jews from God’s favor. Stated otherwise, it is God’s response to Jewish unbelief.

But does not v. 1 say that God has not rejected his people? Is there not then a contradiction? No. Some argue that there is no contradiction because the Greek words are different. That is true, but the concepts appear to be the same. The difference is that in v. 1 Paul is dealing with the Jews as such. He is asking if God had rejected the Jews, every single one of them, just because they were Jews. In v. 15 Paul is talking only about the nonremnant, heart-hardened, unbelieving Jews. God rejected them and, as we shall see, broke them off the tree. The verse says nothing about the Jewish nation as a whole. It speaks only of the individual Jews who rejected the gospel and whom God in turn rejected. The verse also hold out hope for the acceptance

of “some” who, on an individual basis, responded to the gospel and believed in and were obedient to Christ. To refer v. 15 to the Jews as a nation does in fact place v. 15 in contradiction with v. 1.

The second part of v. 15 is similar to the last clause in v. 12 in both its meaning and in its relation to the rest of the verse – if the first part of the verse is true, then that gives all the more reason to believe the second part. “What will their acceptance be” is literally “what the acceptance.” The clause has no verb and no possessive pronoun (“their”), although the latter may be understood based on its similarity to v. 12. However, as we have seen earlier, the insertion of the future tense (“will be) is based doctrinal bias and eisegetical presuppositions that have no basis in scripture.

The first issue in 15b is who is accepting whom. Some refer it to the Jews acceptance of the gospel, but most refer it to God’s acceptance of the individual Jews who come back into a saved relationship. God rejected them because of their unbelief, but He was anxious to receive them back if they turned to Him through Christ. The second issue is what this acceptance is. Observe that it is the structural equivalent of “fullness” in v. 12. Those who interpret “fullness” in v. 12 to be an end-time conversion (acceptance) of the Jewish nation tend to interpret “acceptance” as the same event. Once again there is no basis for such an interpretation other than a dogmatic doctrinal bias. We have seen that “fullness” in v. 12 refers to salvation of individual Jews, something that we already occurring in Paul’s day, and that “rejection” in v. 15a refers to unbelieving Jews as individuals and not to the Jewish nation as a whole. The same must be true of their acceptance. Additionally, remember that there is no future tense verb in the original text.

When the Jews were converted in Paul’s day it was as “life from the dead.” Premillennialists contend that Paul’s lesser to greater arguments in vv. 12 and 15 mean that “riches” (v. 12) become “much greater riches” and “reconciliation” in v. 15 becomes “life from the dead” which is then interpreted as a great eschatological (end-time) event in which God restores the Jews as his people and revives Israel as a nation. They argue that to refer it to the new life that we now have in Christ would be anticlimactic. The only basis for arguing that it is in the future is that Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. This ignores that fact that the structure of one’s argument does not serve as a time indicator. That is the job of verbs and verb tenses and, as we have seen, verbs and thus tenses are absent in locations vital to the premillennialists’ argument.

What then is life from the dead? What the immediate and greater context supports is that “life from the dead” refers to an element of the individual’s present salvation and regeneration (see 6:4, 11; 8:10; Eph. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). If the Jews rejection results in the reconciliation for the Gentiles, then the Jews’ reception results in their own resurrection to new life in Christ. Like the prodigal son, they were dead but are alive again (John 15:24).

Some contend that v. 16 begins the next section, but it seems best fitted as the conclusion Paul’s discussion in vv. 11-15. The general subject is that there is hope for the salvation of the hardened portion of Israel. The main point is that God still has a special place in his heart for “his people,” even those who had rejected the Messiah. This does not mean that God will give them special treatment with regard to salvation, but it does mean that God still loves them, has made every possible effort to save them, and will receive them if and when they believe and obey the Lord. Is it not true that the Jews were included in the Great Commission, “make disciples of all the nations” (see Matt. 28:19-20), and is it not also true that the Jews’ had the first opportunity to accept the Messiah since the preaching of the gospel began “in Jerusalem” (See Luke 24:47)? Since God is no respecter of persons, there is no basis to believe that either now or at the end-times that the Jews will be saved by any process other than the proclamation of the gospel under the Great Commission. Did Paul not teach this very thing?

Romans 10: ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

V.16 has two metaphors. The first is based on the divine ownership of all things. God required the first part of anything to be dedicated to him. Paul uses one example of this practice – presenting as an offering to God a portion of bread made from the meal ground from the first-harvested grain (Num. 15:17-21). Though Numbers 15 does not precisely say this, based on the general practice it was assumed that the offering of the firstfruits consecrated to the Lord the entire grain harvest, or all the flour and dough made from it. The second metaphor is the relation of a tree's root to its branches. The root is the source of water and nutrients for the branches. The condition of the root affects the condition of the branches as well. "If the root is holy, so are the branches." What do these metaphors represent? In answering that question care must be taken to avoid 1) assuming that they are identical in meaning or 2) assuming that the point of the root-branches metaphor in v. 16 is the same as the point of the extended root-branches metaphor in vv. 17-24. Some do take the metaphors to be parallel, *e.g.*, some have understood the firstfruits and the root to refer to Jesus Christ. In view of the context, however, it is more likely that they refer to the Jews in some manner. The most common view is that the firstfruits and root refer to the patriarchs, especially Abraham, while the "whole batch" or entire "lump" (KJV, NASB), as well as the branches, refer to all the Jews who have descended from them. Most who hold this view contend that the Jews as a nation will always be treated in a special way because of their relation to the patriarchs (v. 28). What, then, would be the nature of this shared holiness? In a generic sense, to be holy means to be separated or set apart from all the rest; in a religious generic sense it means to be set apart for God or consecrated to God in a way that is special but does not necessarily involve salvation. Some interpret v. 16 as God's promise that the nation of Israel will always be a distinct and special people, just as the patriarchs were set apart in the beginning. Others tie this in with the idea that God will one day restore the Jewish nation to its "original pre-eminence as leaders in the worship of Jehovah.

Some do interpret "holiness" in a salvific sense, however, and see this verse as a promise that all Israel will one day be saved (see v. 26). To some this means spiritual Israel only, *i.e.*, all the spiritual descendants of the patriarchs. To others it is a promise that one day all (or a great majority of) ethnic Jews will be saved.

All of these views miss the point. A key point is that the two metaphors are not parallel in their meaning. If they are not parallel, what do they mean? In other passages Paul uses the term “firstfruits” to refer to the first converts in a particular context (16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15). That is the point of the first metaphor. The firstfruits are the early Jewish converts, the Jewish Christian remnant. The batch is the Jews as a whole, especially the unbelieving and hardened Jews.

Also, “holy” here does have the connotation of salvation. This does not imply, though, that just as the first converts have been saved, so ultimately all Jews will be saved. Paul’s point is that if *some* Jews can be saved, then *all* of them can be saved. If the first Jewish Christians were accepted of God, the entire nation is capable of being accepted. They are not irrevocably rejected. It is the same hope that Paul holds out in this paragraph when he refers to the “fullness” and “acceptance” of the Jews (v. 12 and v. 15).

The second metaphor is slightly different. The root includes the patriarchs, but not alone. It refers to the entire Old Testament Israelite nation considered as a whole. The branches are all ethnic Jews living in the New Testament era, considered as individuals. The primary meaning of “holy” is the generic concept of “set apart” or “consecrated” to God, but its ultimate reference is still to salvation. Paul’s point is that under the Old Covenant God chose the nation of Israel to be the instrument by which he worked his redemptive purpose in the world (9:6-29). Even though he no longer has a special purpose for Israel as a nation, his love and concern for “his people” in Old Testament times carries forward into the gospel era. Every branch, *i.e.*, every individual Jew, is just as personally precious and special to him today as was the root, the nation of old. Thus the door of salvation is still open even to the hardened, unbelieving Jews. God is waiting to add them to the remnant. The point of the verse, then, is neither to promise that Israel as a nation will be restored to its Old Testament prominences, nor to guarantee that all Jews actually *will* be saved. Rather, it is to stress that fact that any and all Jews *can* be saved (v. 16a), and that God *wants* them to be saved (v. 16b).

How, then, can they be saved? Paul answers that question in vv. 17-24. Paul stays with the metaphor of the olive tree, but he expands it

considerably and uses it for different purposes. He uses it to show how the New Testament church is related to Old Testament Israel, and how Jews and Gentiles are related to the church. The main point of vv. 17-22 is a double warning to Gentile Christians. They are warned not to have an attitude of self-righteous superiority toward unbelieving Jews, and not to presume that they are any more immune to falling away than the Jews who fell. The main point of vv. 23-24, on the other hand, is an explanation of how the fallen and hardened Jews can be saved.

Recall that in v. 16 the root is identified as national Israel while the branches are identified as including some individual Jews who lived in the New Testament era. In vv. 17-24 Paul expands the metaphor in at least three ways. First, the concept of the tree as a whole is important. In v. 16 the generic root and branches were important. Here a particular tree is in view. While the roots and branches are still important, it is also important to understand the tree as a whole. Second, the branches are not limited to individual Jews, but refer also to the Gentiles. Third, the grafting of the branches is a central element of the metaphor.

Examining the composition of the olive tree reveals that, as in v. 16, the root stands for Old Testament Israel as a whole. Thus it includes but is not limited to the patriarchs. It represents the entire nation throughout its entire history from the patriarchs forward, not as the aggregate of saved individuals (the remnant), but as God's covenant servant. It represents Israel in its role of fulfilling God's redemptive purposes, culminating in the coming of the Messiah. Thus the root includes all blessings enumerated in 9:4-5: the patriarchs, the covenants, the promises, and in a sense even the Messiah himself.

The branches of the tree, which are the focal point of the metaphor, are the saved individuals of the New Testament era. As such they are the new Israel. The olive tree as a whole represents the two Israels to which v. 9:6b alludes, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." The root is Old Testament ethnic Israel; the branches are New Testament spiritual Israel. When the Messiah came and the Old Testament prototree was transformed into the olive tree, this transformation was a moment of crisis for all Jews. Prior to this time all individual Jews—unbelievers as well as believers—were part of

the prototree as an instrument of service to God. But with the coming of Christ and the transformation of the tree, all unbelieving Jews as individual branches of the old tree were broken off. There are no unbelievers on the olive tree; its branches consist of believers only.

The olive tree metaphor teaches that there is a definite discontinuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. Paul's tree is not the same as the Old Testament prototree that was transformed at Pentecost into something different. What once an entire tree is not just the root of the tree. The church is as different from Israel as a tree's branches are from its root.

But this fact in itself implies a *continuity* between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. The old tree was not simply cut down and replaced with a completely new one. The church by itself is not the entire tree, but only the branches that are growing from a root that is part of that same tree. The two parts of this one tree have never existed simultaneously but are sequential in time. I.e., the root and the branches represent two interconnected stages in salvation history. Though the root itself no longer exists, its prior existence was an essential preparation for the present reality of the branches. Herein lies the basis for one of Paul's main points in this section: the relationship of dependence between the two Israels. I.e., the church as the new Israel is dependent upon what was accomplished by old Israel. The New Testament branches would have no existence apart from their Old Testament root, and they constantly reap the rich benefits of what God has done through the latter (vv. 17–18). This is one reason why Paul warns the Gentile Christians not to boast over the fallen Jews (v. 18a).

While the meaning of the olive tree as a whole tells us something about the relation between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, the imagery of the pruning and grafting of the individual branches tells us something about the salvation of Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament era. Unlike the root-branches illustration in v. 16, which dealt exclusively with Jews, the branches in the extended metaphor include both Jews and Gentiles. While Jewish Christians are described as belonging naturally to the cultivated olive tree, Gentiles Christians are pictured as belonging by

nature to a wild olive tree and being grafted into the cultivated one (v. 24).

Paul's discussion of Jews and Gentiles in this paragraph is in terms of God's pruning some branches from the tree and grafting others into it. A crucial point is that, when the Old Testament prototree was transformed into the new olive tree, some of the original branches (Jews) were broken off, which was an indication of their lost state. These branches were already lost before the transformation since the Old Testament prototree had no significance relative to salvation. When Christ came and the tree was changed, all Jews who refused to accept him as the Messiah and conform to his teaching were pruned from the tree. This may well have included some Jews who were in a saved state before because of their faith in Jehovah under the Old Testament revelation, but who rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah. All Jews who did believe in Christ and conformed to his teaching remained on the new tree. At the same time the Gentiles who accepted Jesus and conformed to his teaching were taken from paganism (the "wild tree") and grafted into the cultivated and transformed olive tree in the community of the saved (Col. 1:13-14; 2:21-28).

Paul's other point is a continuation of his theme in vv. 11-16 – the pruned-off-Jews are not irrevocably lost but can still be saved. He is not just declaring that they can be saved. He is also showing how they will be saved, *i.e.*, by being grafted again into their own cultivated and transformed tree, the church (vv. 23-24). This grafting is done branch by branch as individual Jews come to believe in Christ as the Messiah and conform to his teaching (v. 23). It has nothing to do with a supposed future restoration of the Jewish nation, or a time when the natural descendants of Abraham will once again be the Lord's chosen people of blessing. This is how both Jews and Gentiles will be saved. It is the one hope of Gentiles and Jews alike. This is now all Israel will be saved (v. 26).

Vv. 17-22 contain words of warning to the Gentiles. In the first part Paul warns the Gentile Christians not to think of themselves as somehow superior to the Jewish branches that were broken off of the tree. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive tree have been grafted in among the others and now share

in that which the root has produced, do not boast over those branches. This is an “if-then” clause in which the first clause (“if” v. 17) is assumed to be true, from which the second clause (“then” understood, v. 18a) naturally follows.

Paul keeps the root-branches metaphor introduced in v. 16 and begins to apply it to the way individual Jews and Gentiles are saved. He refers first to the Jews, who are compared with branches on a tree, some of which have been “broken off.” This refers to the Jews who rejected Christ as their Messiah, and to God’s punitive act of hardening and rejecting them (vv. 7, 15).

Next Paul refers to the Gentile Christians, whom he is addressing (v. 13). He uses the singular “you” to put his admonitions on a more personal level. This “you” is the typical Gentile Christian representing the whole group. Paul addressed the Jews in a similar way in 2:1ff.

The second clause (v. 18a) The Gentile Christian is here described as “a wild olive shoot” (a branch cut from a wild or uncultivated olive tree) that has been grafted into the cultivated olive tree “among the others.” The branches of this cultivated tree represent the New Testament church, and “the others” are the Jews who were the first converts to Christ and thus the first branches on the tree. That the wild branches were grafted in “among” them (beginning in Acts 10) means that they were placed alongside the Jewish Christians who had already been there from Acts 2 and following.

V. 18b also speaks of Gentile Christians. It describes the result of their being grafted into the olive tree alongside the believing Jews – the root supports you. This looks back to v. 17, where Paul said that the Gentiles “now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.” As seen in the introduction above, this root is Old Testament Israel as it fulfilled its covenant purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world. In this sense Old Testament Israel is the indispensable source of all the spiritual benefits that are absorbed by the branches, i.e., by each individual member of the church.

Thus in this exhortation Paul warns Gentile Christians not to brag or boast over against the Jews who were broken off the tree, as if becoming a Christian were the result of some kind of competition

between the two groups, with the Gentiles being the winners. You have no reason to boast, he says, as if being grafted into the tree were a sign of your superiority over those rejected Jews.

V. 18b is not an implicit permission to go ahead and boast. Rather, Paul is saying, “If you are still inclined to boast, or if you still have a boastful spirit, please remember this” What Paul asks them to remember is very close in meaning to v. 17c, but here he is more forceful: “*You* [emphatic] do not support the root, *but* [emphatic] the root supports you.” It is important to see that the root is not just the patriarchs, as many believe, and especially not just “the covenant of salvation that God made with Abraham,” but the entire scope of the Jews’ covenant service from Abraham to Christ. Paul is thus asking the Gentile Christians, “What, historically, do the Jews owe to you? Which of their glorious blessings (9:4–5) came through you? Obviously, none; so your boasting is vain. The relationship of dependence is actually the other way around.” The Gentiles owed all they were proud of to a relation to the Jews, the race they would despise. Any merit, any virtue, any hope of salvation that the Gentiles had arose entirely from the fact that they were grafted in a stock that is fully Jewish. How could they ignore their Jewish heritage? It is that very heritage upon which the Gentile Christians themselves depended for their own spiritual standing.

Paul further drives this point home in v. 19 by putting a question in the mouth of the proud Gentile Christian: “You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” The way Paul words the question highlights the egotism that he wants to turn aside: “Branches were broken off so that *I, even I*, could be grafted in!” The implication is that this person thinks God excluded some Jews from the church just to make a place for Gentile believers. “That surely involves some superiority in me,” is the Gentiles’ implied conclusion. “I am surely better than those unbelieving Jews!”

In v. 20a Paul admits that there was a bit of truth in what he attributed to the Gentiles. Paul had already established that the Gentiles’ salvation was the result of the Jews’ transgression (vv. 11-16), and the reconciliation of the word resulted from the Jews rejection. But that is no basis for boasting. The pruning off of the Jews and the grafting in of the Gentiles were not cause and effect events. There was no

intrinsic connection between them. The Jews were broken off because of unbelief and the Gentiles stood by faith. The Gentiles did not stand because of anything they had done. The conclusion is stated again – the circumstances of the Jews’ rejection and the Gentiles’ acceptance were no basis for boasting against the Jews.

In vv. 21b and 21 Paul advises the Gentiles that the proper attitude is fear, not arrogance. Fear can be one of two things – reverential awe or fear in the presence of the judgment. Perhaps both are involved here. Reverential awe is always present in the life of the Christian. But surely the fear of judgment is present here as well. Paul tell them that just as the Jews were cast out, God would not spare the Gentiles either if they if they lost faith. There is one context in which the fear of terror is still necessary even for Christians, namely, when we stand on the brink of apostasy or falling away. In such a situation, how can we not call to mind that “it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31)?

Many denominations influenced by the Calvinistic false teaching of the doctrine of the eternal security of the saint, make a serious mistake to miss Paul’s teaching here of the real possibility of falling from grace and losing salvation. This is another reason why Gentile Christians, and Jewish Christians as well, should realize the folly of arrogance regarding their salvation status. The “natural branches” are the Jews, who in view of their birth association with the root are inherently suitable for being attached as branches to the tree. But even so, when some refused to believe in Jesus, God did not spare them. He rejected them and broke them off the tree. This was true even if they were in a saved state before being confronted with the gospel. If they refused to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, they were broken off, and given no place in the transformed olive tree. And if God did not spare even these, he will certainly not spare the wild olive branches—Gentile Christians—that have no natural connection with the tree, if they return to their unbelief.

In continuing his instruction to the Gentiles of the real possibility of their losing their salvation, Paul’s language speaks to the modern world as well. For many God is a one-sided God who is little more than an eternal slot machine – put in a prayer and out pops a blessing. God has nothing by goodwill and love and could not and if he could,

never would, punish anyone. He is a kindly dispositioned old man. Paul continues to deny this concept in v. 22 by addressing the two sides of the Divine character – kindness and sternness.

This refers to what are rightly called “the two sides of the Divine character.” These two attributes are generally equivalent to God’s love and God’s holiness, which I believe are the two most basic and equally-ultimate moral attributes of God. God’s love is his basic goodwill toward other moral beings. Other attributes within the sphere of his love are mercy, patience, grace, and kindness. God’s holiness, on the other hand, is his perfect moral character, which is the basis of his work as Lawgiver and Judge. It embraces other attributes such as wrath and vengeance. Because these two sides of God’s nature are equally ultimate, it is a serious misconception to think that they are just two different ways of expressing the same divine attribute. An example of this error is one commentator’s assertion that both kindness and sternness “are the expression of God’s holy and faithful love.” There is probably no more widespread false doctrine in Christendom than this, and few with more serious consequences.

Why does Paul admonish the representative Gentile Christian (and us) to “consider” or “observe” the kindness and sternness of God? Because these are the two basic attributes that God expresses toward sinners, depending on their response to the grace of his Son, Jesus Christ. In this context they are the attributes that lie behind the breaking off of the unbelieving Jewish branches and the grafting in of the believing Gentile branches: sternness to those who fell, *i.e.*, the Jews who rejected Christ (v. 11), but kindness to you as a Gentile who has accepted Christ.

Paul says all these things to set up his final warning to Gentile Christians, which also applies to all branches on the olive tree (all members of his church) in all times and places. *I.e.*, the very fact that you are on the tree (and by implication saved) means that you have received the kindness of God. But be warned: you will remain on the tree as a recipient of God’s kindness **provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.**

“Provided that you continue” is translated from *ean* with the subjunctive, a form that expresses a contingency that may or may not

be the case in the future. (For the same form see 13:4; 14:8.) God will continue to bestow his kindness upon you, *if and only if* you “continue in his kindness.” What will happen if you *do not* continue to trust God’s grace? Paul’s answer is very clear: “you also,” like the Jews who refused to believe, “will be cut off.” You will lose your salvation. This verse brings into sharp focus the issue of whether or not salvation is conditional, which includes the issue of “once saved, always saved.” In general Calvinists believe that God’s grace is sovereignly bestowed and maintained in an unconditional way, and non-Calvinists believe that it is conditional. But even some non-Calvinists hold that once a person believes by his own free choice, he will unconditionally continue to believe from that point on. This is the essence of the “once saved, always saved” doctrine.

This verse unequivocally establishes the view that salvation is conditional. Just as *becoming* saved is conditioned upon faith, *staying* saved is conditioned upon continuing to believe. You will remain as a branch on the olive tree “if you continue” (NASB) in God’s kindness. (See Col 1:23 for the very same point.) More specifically this verse shows that falling from a saved state and thus losing one’s salvation is possible. The possibility of believers ‘falling away’, apostatizing, is one which Paul certainly did not exclude. Perseverance is a Christian responsibility, not an unconditional promise.

How do Calvinists handle this text? One may be surprised to find that some strong Calvinists conclude from this verse that God’s kindness is not unconditional and that it requires genuine faith on man’s part. But how could anyone believe that salvation is truly conditional, and at the same time deny the possibility of falling away? The answer, for the Calvinist, is as follows. First, God does require sinners to have faith in Jesus as a condition for being saved. Therefore, technically, salvation is conditional. But at the same time God sovereignly determines who will have faith and who will not. To those whom God has unconditionally chosen for eternal life, he unconditionally gives the gift of faith. Once the faith has been given, of course, it is the person who believes, and not God. Thus the person is fulfilling the condition for salvation. They argue that 11:22 must not be understood in the sense that God will supply the kindness, man the faith. Salvation, they further argue, is always God’s gift. It is never a 50–50 affair. From start to finish it is the work of God. But this does not

remove human responsibility. God does not exercise faith for man or in his place. It is and remains man who reposes his trust in God, but it is God who both imparts this faith to him and enables him to use it. They then conclude that this is the sound, biblical sense in which the Calvinists can speak about salvation's being conditional.

This and other such explanations are nothing but theological double-talk. To say that this is a "sound, biblical sense" in which salvation is conditional, and that such a system "does not remove human responsibility," is a sham. It is not enough just to say that God sets conditions for salvation. The Calvinist may begin with this premise, but then he declares that God unconditionally decides who will meet the conditions, and then unilaterally causes them to meet these conditions. In such a scenario there are no conditionality and human responsibility in any normal sense of these terms.

If persevering faith is a sovereign gift of God, what is the purpose of warnings in the Bible, such as the one in 11:22? One Calvinist commentator answers the question by admitting that such passages imply contingency in man's continuance in the mercy of God, but they are nevertheless in harmony with sovereign and prevailing Divine grace. This is true because God both gives and preserves faith in the elect. The chosen will without fail persevere in faith, because God will infallibly enable them to do so. The commentator adds that grace imparts *perseverance* by imparting and maintaining faith. And how does grace maintain faith? Among other things, he argues that faith is properly animated and energized" through these warnings themselves.

All such attempts to harmonize the "if" in 11:22 (or elsewhere) with Calvinism, or with any "once saved, always saved" belief, amount to more double-talk and reduce Paul's warning to a travesty. Unless there is a genuine possibility that this warning may be disregarded by a genuine believer, then it is not a warning at all, and its very presence in the Bible is deceptive.

Another Calvinist commentator takes a slightly different approach in attempting to reconcile 11:22 with a denial of the possibility of falling away, but his arguments are just as untenable. His view is that not every branch on the tree is a true believer in the first place. This must

be true, he says, because the unbelieving Jews who were cut off the tree in reality were never part of the tree at all. It is only for the sake of his metaphor that Paul presents them as if they had been. In the same way, then, those Gentiles within the church who appear to be part of God's people, yet do not continue in faith, may never have been part of that tree at all.

This explanation fails for three reasons. One, it is an unwarranted assumption that all the Jews who were originally cut off from the tree were never truly saved to begin with. It is quite clear that many Jews who had a faith adequate to save them in light of the limitations of the Old Testament revelation refused to elevate their faith to the New Testament level when first confronted with the gospel. (Paul himself was surely in this category.) These would be among the branches that were broken off.

Second, this explanation does not take account of the difference between the Old Testament prototree and the olive tree as it has existed under the New Covenant dispensation. All Jews were branches on the former, but this had no implications concerning salvation. The latter is occupied solely by those who are saved, Jews and Gentiles. Is this not the point of the breaking off of the unbelieving Jewish branches in the first place?

Third, the speculation that the Gentiles who do not continue in the faith may never have been part of the tree at all goes against everything Paul says in this paragraph. "You stand by faith," he says to the Gentile representative in v. 20. If the addressee is not saved—not truly part of the tree, then everything about this statement is false. God's kindness has been given to you, Paul says in v. 22, in contrast with the fallen Jews who received God's sternness. There is no way to reconcile this affirmation with a mere appearance of salvation. The focus in vv. 23–24 will shift to the fallen Jews, but at this point note that the conditional promise about Jewish unbelievers in v. 23a is parallel in every way to the conditional warning about Gentile believers in v. 22b. If we cannot take the warning seriously, why should we take the promise seriously? If we say that v. 22 does not imply that an actual falling away can take place, must we not assume that v. 23 does not mean that any fallen Jews will actually be saved? But no one would ever consider the latter. One of the best-known

Calvinists argues that after this warning to Gentile believers against pride and presumption, Paul is ready with his promise to Jewish unbelievers. His argument is that if those grafted in could be cut off, then those cut off could be grafted in again. Just so! But the “once saved, always saved” doctrine completely destroys the symmetry between the two conditions and leaves the latter open to doubt. Indeed, commentator himself says of the warning in v. 22 that warning does not mean that those who truly belong to him will ever be rejected! However, neither he nor anyone else has ever said of verse 23 that the warning does not mean that those Jews who truly rejected him will ever be accepted.

Vv. 23 and 24 are words of hope for hardened Jews. In these verses Paul returns to the main theme of the chapter – God has not completely rejected the Jews. It is true that only a remnant accepted the Messiah in the beginning, and that the rest were hardened, rejected, and broken off the tree. But since v. 11 Paul has held forth the possibility and the hope that individuals in this latter group may still return to God. Here he reaffirms that hope as he shows how the rejected Jews may be saved: “And if they (those who fell, v. 22) do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (v. 23). Clearly God has not abandoned the Jewish people but is ready and willing to receive them back to himself at any time.

It is also clear in this verse that the Jews’ return to and acceptance by God is *conditional*. It is conditioned upon their change of heart concerning Jesus. They will be grafted into the tree *if* they do not continue in unbelief, but turn to Jesus in full faith and surrender. The promise that they will be grafted in is a promise that they will be saved.

In spite of the clear and obvious conditional nature of this promise, some interpreters completely ignore the stated condition and take Paul’s statement as an absolute promise that the Jews—all of them—will one day be saved. While he recognizes that vv. 23–24 reveal it only as a possibility, he claims that the salvation of all of the Jews is established fully as a decreed event in the next section. Another says of v. 23, that in the end, Israel will accept God’s act for her in Christ and will return to her natural place within God’s chosen people. The

well-known preacher and writer, John MacArthur, commenting on vv. 23–24, says, “The destiny of Israel can and will be reversed. Her return to the Lord not only is possible but certain.” Even though this promise is given here with a condition, MacArthur asserts, “God had long beforehand assured His people that the condition would be met.”

What is happening here? Just as in reference to v. 22b, we are witnessing an inability—or an unwillingness—to take seriously the significance of Paul’s “if.” In v. 22, in the interest of preserving the “once saved, always saved” doctrine, some declare that the if-clause is something that *will not* happen, period. Here in v. 23, in the interest of supporting a particular view of the end-times, some declare that the if-clause is something that *will* happen, period. Paul might just as well have omitted the “if” in both cases. We must take Paul at his word. He does not say “when”; he says “if.”

Whether few or many Jews do come to faith in Christ, this verse shows *how* they will be saved and restored to God, namely, by being grafted into the olive tree, which is the church. There is absolutely nothing here about a restoration of the nation of Israel to its role as a separate and special people of God. The only thing Paul promises the Jews here, conditioned upon faith in Christ, is that they will be grafted into the olive tree. But this is not the same tree from which they were broken off in the first place. This is a transformed tree, only the root of which is Old Testament national Israel. The branches are the new Israel, the church, and they consist of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. To be joined to the tree is to be united with the Gentiles, not set apart from them again. To expect a national restoration to an Old Testament-like special role is to go against the very essence of the olive-tree metaphor.

False hopes must not blind us to the very real possibility Paul sets forth here. The Jews *can* become a part of the tree, for God is able to graft them in again. We should note that God’s grafting the Jews into the tree is not the same as causing them to believe. The first part of this verse makes it clear that there is a difference between the believing and the grafting-in. God can and will graft them in, i.e., will add them to his church, but they must first meet the stated condition of not persisting in unbelief.

V. 24 adds nothing new to Paul's argument. It reinforces the last statement in v. 23 that God is able to draft the fallen Jewish branches back into the tree. Since God has already done the latter in saving the Gentiles, He will have no problem in grafting in Jews who come to faith (do not persist in unbelief).

The Gentiles were cut out of an olive tree that was wild by nature. The Gentiles by nature belonged to the pagan world. This is where they were born and reared; this is where they learned and lived by the antibiblical worldview. This is where they were "at home," i.e., on the wild olive tree. But when they came to Christ they were cut off from this tree and grafted into the "cultivated olive tree," which is described as "cultivated" because of its Jewish root. The cultivation process includes all of God's dealings with the Jews from Abraham up to the first coming of Christ. Because of this background the earliest Jewish Christians—the first branches of the transformed olive tree—in a sense grew naturally out of this root. But when Gentiles were pried loose from their paganism and united with this Old Testament root, this was definitely "contrary to nature," i.e., against everything they had thus far stood for.

On the other hand, v. 24b says that when unbelieving Jews ("these") are converted, this is like grafting broken-off branches back "into their own olive tree." Because of its Jewish root, even unbelieving, broken-off Jews have a natural affinity with the olive tree. Indeed, it is called "their own tree" for this very reason. Old Testament ethnic Israel is not the tree as such, but it is the *root* of the tree. Thus when a Jew is converted to Christ he is being attached to his true roots; he is taking his natural place among the branches (the church) that were the divinely intended goal of the Israelite nation all along. What could be more natural than this?

Verse 24b is sometimes taken as an unqualified promise that the natural branches will be grafted in again, i.e., that they *will* be saved. It is true that the verb "be grafted" is future tense, but given the "if-then" form of the verse, however, it is more reasonable to take this as a logical future. Paul is simply stating a greater-to-lesser argument: if A is true, then it is even more likely that B will also be true. Also, the condition in v. 23 must be carried over into v. 24; "will be grafted in" must be qualified with "if they do not persist in unbelief."

The main point is to show that from God's side, there is absolutely no obstacle to the Jews' salvation. Their hardening (v. 7) and their rejection (v. 15) need not be the final word concerning their eternal destiny. God is ready and willing to receive them back, if they will believe in their Redeemer. He has already added repentant, believing Gentiles to the church; and if he has done this, *how much more likely is it* that believing Jews will also be added? The key expression is "by how much more," the same phrase used in v. 12 in a similar kind of argument. The purpose of the present argument is to give us confidence in God's power to save even fallen Jews. However, there is in this New Covenant age only one olive tree, only one chosen people, and only one way of salvation. Any Jews who are saved will be saved by being grafted into this one tree. The Jewish branches and the Gentile branches are joined together into one aggregate of saved persons (the church), where the Jew-Gentile distinction is irrelevant.

Vv. 25 to 32 deal with God's plan for Israel's salvation. In this paragraph primary interest is usually focused on v. 26a, "And so all Israel will be saved." What it means is the subject of endless discussion. Every part of it is controversial. How extensive is the word "all"? Does "Israel" refer to ethnic or spiritual Israel? To what status is Israel "saved"?

One of the more common conclusions based on this text is that at some time in the future, at or near the end of this age, most living Jews will turn to Christ and be restored as a nation to a place of preeminence in God's kingdom. This interpretation is erroneous and anti-biblical for reasons that will be made clear in the following exposition. At this point suffice to say that in v. 26a, emphasis is usually placed on the wrong word, namely, "all," with the verse being read thus: "And so *all* Israel will be saved." The emphasis should be on the word "so," taken in the sense of "thus, in this manner." Thus we should read it: "And *in this way* all Israel will be saved." Paul's point regarding Israel's salvation is "How?" and not "How many?"

This does not mean that there is a question whether Israel's salvation will be by some means other than faith in Jesus. That issue has already been settled, especially in ch. 10. Rather, the question has to do with the interrelationship between Israel and the Gentiles, continuing the

discussion begun in v. 11. Paul has already emphasized that Israel's sin and rejection have been used by God as a means to save the Gentiles; here he is emphasizing that the salvation of the Gentiles is God's means of bringing salvation to Israel.

This becomes clear when we view this paragraph in the perspective of ch. 11 as a whole. The discussion is still controlled by the question in 11:1, "Did God reject his people?" The answer is an emphatic No, for two reasons. First, there existed in the past, and there continues to exist "at the present time . . . a remnant chosen by grace" (11:5). What about "the others"? They were hardened (7b–10). Second, even those who are presently and hereafter hardened may still turn to Christ and be saved, because God has worked out a complex plan for showing mercy upon both Jews and Gentiles. This plan is spelled out in 11:11–32.

In the first step of his plan God uses the sin and hardening of Israel as a means of bringing the riches of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul emphasizes this in 11:11–16, while at the same time revealing that the salvation of the Gentiles will in turn be used to bring salvation to the Jews. The olive tree metaphor is an interlude meant to preclude Gentile Christian arrogance, especially by showing that the underlying reasons for being lost or saved are unbelief and belief respectively, for both Gentiles and Jews (11:17–24).

This leads to the present paragraph, where the main emphasis is on the climactic second step of God's plan, namely, that God will use the salvation of the Gentiles as a means of bringing salvation to the Jews. This is the way in which "all Israel will be saved." In v. 26a the word *all* is meant to be contrasted with the *remnant* saved "at the present time" (v. 5). *I.e.*, in v. 5 Paul affirms that a saved remnant existed at the time of his writing. But what about "the others"—the mass of unsaved Jews, both present and future? They can be saved, too; and the burden of vv. 11–32 (vv. 25–32 in particular) is to show how this is done. *I.e.*, *all* Israel, not just the presently existing remnant, will be saved. But *how* will they be saved? In this way: by the *fullness of the Gentiles* (v. 25), *if* they put their *faith in Jesus Christ* (v. 23).

These two main aspects of God's complex plan for showing mercy upon all are summed up in vv. 30–31: because of the Jews'

disobedience the Gentiles have received mercy (v. 30; see vv. 11–16); and likewise because the Gentiles have received mercy, Israel will also receive mercy (v. 31; see vv. 25–32)!

What, then, is the purpose of this paragraph? Some think it is to reveal the mystery of Israel's future. Commentators' headings on this section such as "The Final Mystery Revealed" and "The Mystery of Israel: It Will All Be Saved" reveal their interpretation. However, this can hardly be the purpose of this paragraph since there is nothing in it that has not been stated or implied earlier.

This paragraph presents no new data, but simply sums up the main points of ch. 11 with the main emphasis being on the way God uses the salvation of the Gentiles to bring mercy upon Israel. This serves as a fitting climax to chs. 9–11 as a whole, in that God is shown to be not just fair and faithful in his relationship with the Jews, but much more than fair in that he offers them his undeserved grace and mercy.

In vv. 25-27 Paul first declares the mystery of Israel's salvation: its reality, its means, and its nature. He begins with a word not translated in the NIV – "for" or "because." This word connects vv. 25ff. with the olive tree illustration, especially the imagery of grafting the broken-off natural branches back into the tree help to understand how Israel will be saved.

In v. 25 Paul begins with a formula, "I do not want you to be ignorant," that he sometimes uses to call attention to an important point. "Brothers" is part of the formula. It indicates he is addressing the entire church, but the context shows he has Gentiles mainly in mind (see 11:13). In 11:17 he began using second person singular, addressing a typical representative Gentile Christian; but here he switches to second person plural. In this paragraph "you" and "they" still refer to Gentiles and Jews respectively.

Specifically, Paul does not want the Gentile Christians to be ignorant of "this mystery." The word "mystery" does not mean something that is and forever will be mysterious and incomprehensible. In the biblical context it refers to a truth once hidden in the mind of God and undiscoverable by human reason, but now made known by divine

revelation and fully open to human understanding. Thus Paul is claiming that what he is teaching here is a revelation from God. The reason Paul wants Gentile Christians to understand the mystery is “so that you may not be conceited,” or “lest you be wise in your own estimation,” as the NASB literally translates it. In vv. 18–20 Paul has already warned Gentile Christians against arrogant boasting in view of the fact that they were being gathered into the church while only relatively few Jews were being saved. Here he warns them again not to be puffed up with self-importance, *i.e.*, not to assume that God had permanently abandoned Israel and was now focusing his attention exclusively on them.

Exactly what is the content of the mystery that will nullify the Gentiles’ pride? In the New Testament the word *mystērion* is often used in a general way for revelation concerning Christ and his church. A mystery that was of special importance to Paul, though, was the revelation that God had always intended to include Jews and Gentiles together in the church of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9; see 2:11–3:11). In Eph. 3 the emphasis is on the fact that God is bringing the Gentiles into the church; here in 11:25 the emphasis is on the fact that unbelieving Jews may still be brought into the church.

More specifically, in 11:25 the mystery focuses on interdependence between the salvation of the Gentiles and that of Jews. *I.e.*, not only are the Jews and Gentiles united together in the one church, in accordance with God’s plan each group in part owes its inclusion to the other. This is spelled out in the rest of this verse and the beginning of v. 26 in three clauses: (1) “Israel has experienced a hardening in part”; (2) “until the full number of the Gentiles has come in”; (3) “and so all Israel will be saved.” This is the mystery, once hidden and now revealed. The mystery is not just the *fact* that “all Israel will be saved,” but rather the *way* Israel will be saved, as expressed in v.25b. Actually, vv. 25b–26a are a kind of summary of what has already been taught in vv. 11–24; thus we should not assume that “this mystery” refers only to what follows. It includes the content of the preceding verses as well. The first element of the mystery is that **Israel has experienced a hardening in part ...** . Paul has already referred to this hardening in v. 7. It is God’s response to Israel’s initial rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. In essence it is a judicial process by which he hands people over to their own stubbornness.

Paul says that Israel's hardening was only "in part." The sentence says literally that "hardness from a part has happened to Israel," not "hardness has happened to part of Israel." The word "part" is not the object of the verb, nor does the phrase "from a part" modify Israel. It is possible that it modifies "hardness" itself, but more likely it modifies the verb, as it does in its other four New Testament occurrences. Either way it means that even though Israel was hardened, the hardening was only partial; the unbelieving Jews were not completely hardened so as to preclude the possibility of repentance. The NIV ("a hardening in part") reflects this view, as does the NASB ("a partial hardening"). Is this a new point, not made known until v. 25? Not really. That the hardening is only partial is clearly implied in the earlier references to Israel's salvation (vv. 12, 14–15, 23–24). Thus it would seem that there is nothing new in this statement in v. 25 about Israel's hardening. This part of the "mystery" has already been set forth.

The heart of the mystery is in the next clause, i.e., that the hardening will last until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. Combined with the preceding clause, and read in the light of vv. 11–12, 15, 18, this implies that the hardening of Israel has something to do with the coming of the full number or fullness of the Gentiles. At the same time, taken with the following clause (26a), and read in the light of vv. 11, 13–14, it implies that the fullness of the Gentiles has something to do with the salvation of "all Israel." As said earlier, the "mystery" thus is how salvation of Jews and Gentiles is interrelated. It is important for the Gentile Christians to see this, in order to avoid thinking too highly of themselves.

The key question is the meaning of the expression "the full number of the Gentiles." The word translated "full number" (*plērōma*) is the same word the NIV translates as "fullness" in v. 12, where it refers to the fullness of the Jews. Some interpret this as a "full number", i.e., all of the Gentiles whom God has elected to save. Such an interpretation here, as in v. 12, is a doctrinal bias intended to support false doctrines in connection with the end-times.

As was the case in v. 12, *plērōma* has no numerical connotation. Thus it does not refer to the "full number" of Gentiles, but rather to the

fullness of salvation as it was proclaimed to and accepted by the Gentiles, beginning in Acts 10. (See on v. 12 above.) The New Testament nowhere else uses *plērōma* in a numerical sense, but does use it for the fullness of salvation. See John 1:16; Rom. 15:29; Eph. 3:19. See also Col. 2:10, which uses the verb form of the word: “you have been given fullness in Christ” (NIV). Thus the “fullness of the Gentiles” is the spiritual wealth with which God will make the Gentiles full or the abundant nature of the blessings in Christ’s gospel. Thus Paul is not saying anything basically different from v. 11: “Because of [the Jews’] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles”; or from v. 12: “Their loss means riches for the Gentiles”; or from v. 15: “Their rejection is the reconciliation of the world.” In what sense does this full salvation of the Gentiles “come in”? This is *eiserchomai*, the common word for “go in, enter.” In the New Testament it is occasionally used for people entering the kingdom (e.g., Matt. 5:20; 7:21; John 3:5) or entering eternal life (Mark 9:43, 45). Thus many take it in v. 25 as referring to the full number of Gentiles entering the kingdom or the church. But on some occasions the word means simply to come or to appear (see Luke 1:28; Acts 10:3; 19:30). It has a similar sense here, *i.e.*, “until the salvation of the Gentiles has appeared or arrived or come into the picture.” Compare 5:12, where Paul uses this word to declare that *sin* entered or came into the world. Here he uses it to affirm that *salvation* came into the Gentile world.

The point is that the hardening of the Jews was the occasion for the commencement of the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Thus the Gentile Christians should not gloat over the Jews’ lost state; in one sense they owe their very salvation to it. The other side of this coin is that the partial hardening of Israel has happened (and by implication will persist) *until* the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. This places a limit on the hardening of Israel. Once the Gentiles’ participation in the blessings of salvation has become fully established, the period of Israel’s hardening will be over.

Those who interpret “fullness” as referring to a final ingathering of Gentiles at or near the second coming must naturally see this hardening as still present and as continuing up to or near the end. However, if we see the “fullness” as referring to the initial ingathering of Gentiles into the church, then the time of Israel’s hardening was

relatively brief and perhaps was coming to an end in Paul's own day. This is why he can say in v. 31 that the Jews "may *now* receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you [Gentiles]."

Paul implies that the Gentiles' experience of the fullness of salvation in some way leads to the cessation of Israel's hardness. The further implication is that Gentile Christians, rather than feeling conceited because they are saved and most Jews are not, should instead be actively preaching the gospel to the Jewish community.

Note again that what Paul affirms here in v. 25 has already been either stated or implied in vv. 11–24; hence this verse is not revealing anything new but is summarizing the "mystery" already set forth.

The last element in the mystery is this: **And so all Israel will be saved, ...** (26a). This is the conclusion drawn from the first two parts of the mystery, and in fact from 11:1–25 as a whole. Has God rejected his people? It is true that most of them were hardened. But in God's plan this hardening is instrumental in bringing the fullness of salvation to the Gentiles. Once the Gentiles have experienced this fullness, the Jews will be ready to receive God's mercy. Thus the hardening will last only until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. After this they may be grafted back into the olive tree, if they accept the mercy offered to them through the gospel. And in this way, all Israel will be saved. So how can anyone say that God has rejected his people?

Three questions must be kept in mind as this verse is discussed. First, what does "Israel" mean? Also, how extensive is the "all"? Finally, what kind of salvation is Paul talking about? The key issue, of course is this: does this verse predict and thus guarantee the salvation of a large mass of Jews at some point in the future, or does Paul have something else in mind?

Before examining the phrase "all Israel," it is important to have a proper understanding of the first two words in the verse, "and so." The word "and" clearly ties this sentence to the last two clauses, but the word "so" (*houtōs*) does so in an even clearer and more crucial way. Some take this word as indicating a temporal sequence between v. 25b and v. 26a: Israel has experienced a partial hardening until the fullness

of the Gentiles has come in, and “when this is done” all Israel will be saved. However, here *houtōs* should be given its common meaning of “in this manner, thus, so” (*AG*, 602). The point is not *when* all Israel will be saved, but *how*. The word is emphatic: “It will be in this way, and only in this way,” that all Israel will be saved. And what is this way? Here the term points us not to what follows but to what precedes. *I.e.*, Israel will be saved by the coming of salvation to the Gentiles (v. 26b). Under the impression produced on the Jews by the sight of the Gentiles in their fullness peopling the kingdom—all Israel shall be saved.

But exactly what is meant by “all Israel”? There are three major views. Of the three major views, the one most commonly held is that “all Israel” refers to *ethnic Israel as a whole* (View A). The basic idea is that at some point in the future, once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, there will be a mass conversion of Jews. This does not mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but it does mean that most Jews living at that time will become Christians. It is pointed out that the Old Testament occasionally uses “all Israel” in this sense, *e.g.*, 1 Sam 25:1; 1 Kgs. 12:1; 2 Chr. 12:1; Dan. 9:11. Thus *all* Israel, and not just the present remnant (v. 5), will be saved.

View A has two versions, eschatological and noneschatological. The former says the future conversion of all Israel will be associated with Christ’s Second Coming. For some this will involve the restoration of Israel as a national entity, along with its repossession of the original promised land. This is a common feature in the dispensational premillennial view of end-time events.

The noneschatological version of View A says there will be a future mass conversion of Jews, but not necessarily associated with the end-times and not involving a nationalistic restoration. “All Israel” will be saved by becoming a part of the church, alongside Gentile Christians. One writer describes it as predicting the conversion of some generation or generations of Jews, a conversion so real and so vastly extensive that unbelief shall be the small exception at the most, and that Jews as such shall everywhere be recognized as true Christians. Another says Paul promises that the great mass of the Jewish people will one day experience salvation from sin through faith in Christ, but does not promise a return to the land as a political entity.

The second major view is that “all Israel” means *the remnant portion of ethnic Israel*, or all believing Jews in all generations (View B). Here the term “Israel” is taken in a slightly different sense in v. 26 as compared with v. 25 and elsewhere. *I.e.*, it may be true that the mass of Israel has been hardened (v. 25), but all of true spiritual Israel will be saved (v. 26). They will be saved not in a single mass conversion but in the normal process of evangelism, being brought to faith in Christ and added to his church over the whole course of church history.

A Calvinist proponent of View B defends it, saying that “all Israel” means the total number of elect Jews. It means that on the Judgment Day not a single elect Israelite will be lacking. Another says that v. 26a describes the bringing to salvation throughout history of the total number of the elect from among the Jews, adding that these are “the true Israelites.” A third says Paul means that all God’s true Israel, all of it that really deserves the name, will be saved. This includes all true Israel from the patriarchs onward until time ends.

The third main view of “all Israel” is that it refers to *the whole of spiritual Israel*, including both believing Jews and believing Gentiles (View C). In other words, it is God’s new Israel, the church, which is identified in Gal. 3:29 as “Abraham’s seed,” in Gal. 6:16 as “the Israel of God,” and in Phil. 3:3 as “the circumcision.” This view was common among the early church fathers.

What is the validity of each of these views? First, what the main arguments for View A, that “all Israel” means ethnic Israel as a whole. The best argument for this view is that it is consistent with the way the term “Israel” is used elsewhere in Romans, and especially in this context. In 9:1–11:25 the words “Israel” and “Israelite” occur eleven or twelve times (allowing for textual variations), and in each case the reference is clearly to Jews, never to Gentiles. Thus, it is asked, how can we possibly expect Paul, abruptly and without qualification, to use this same term in v. 26 with an entirely different meaning? It is argued that it is exegetically impossible to give to “Israel” in this verse any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter. It is of ethnic Israel Paul is speaking and Israel could not possibly include Gentiles. Especially, since “Israel” in v. 25

undoubtedly means the whole nation, it is impossible that he would use it in a different sense in v. 26. Thus View A concludes that it is virtually certain that “all Israel” here does not include Gentiles.

A second argument for View A is that it seems most consistent with the overall context of 9–11. *I.e.*, one of the main issues in this whole section is the fate of the nation of Israel. The whole context shows clearly that it is the actual Israel of history that is referred to. Thus, there is no way “Israel” here can be spiritualized, considering the context of chapters 9–11. It clearly refers to ethnic Israel, the Jewish people.

A third argument for View A is that the salvation of all ethnic Israel has already been affirmed several times in this chapter, especially in the reference to Israel’s “fullness” in v. 12, her “acceptance” in v. 15, and her “grafting in” in vv. 23–24. Thus it is likely that v. 26 refers to the same thing, because in vv. 15, 25, we have had already a prediction of a restoration of Jews, *en masse*, to grace. It would be anticlimactic to refer v. 26 to anything less; indeed it would be exegetical violence.

A final argument for View A is that if “all Israel” is anything less than the whole nation of Israel, then this statement does not deserve to be called a “mystery” (v. 25) in the sense explained above. To say that all true/elect/spiritual Israel will be saved, whether in the sense of View B or View C, is called a truism or a tautology, *i.e.*, something true by definition. Only the whole of ethnic Israel does justice to the term “mystery.”

Do these four arguments rule out Views B and C, and establish A? The first argument is the strongest, and makes C unlikely, but it does not rule out View B. The second argument likewise has merit and weakens the case for C, but again it does not rule out B. The third argument is altogether invalid because it is based on a false understanding of vv. 12, 15, and 24–25. As demonstrated above, these verses do not refer to a future mass conversion of Israel. All along Paul stresses the very opposite, namely, the salvation, in any age (past, present, future) of *a remnant*. The fourth argument might have some merit if the emphasis in v. 26a were on the word “all.” But since the emphasis is actually on the word “so,” *i.e.*, “in this way,” the

argument misses the point completely. The *how* of all Israel's salvation is surely worthy to be called a mystery.

The conclusion is that the arguments for A and against B and C are not as strong as one might expect, given the widespread acceptance of this view. The last two arguments are invalid in themselves; and the first two arguments, while making C unlikely, by no means rule out B. The issue then turns on whether a good case can be made for B. Before considering B, Brief consideration must be give to C, the view that "all Israel" means all spiritual Israel in general (the church), including both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Recall that the use of the term "Israel" in 9–11 makes this view unlikely. One cannot appeal to 9:6 to support this meaning for "Israel" in v. 26a, since the "spiritual Israel" in 9:6 includes only Jewish believers and not Gentile believers. Thus, it is unwarranted to say that "Israel" in v. 26a means "spiritual Israel" in the broadest sense of that term, the church.

The argument that the context as a whole militates against this view is not as strong, since the salvation of Jews and Gentiles together certainly has been considered in this main section (9:24; 10:12), and even in the immediate context (the olive tree). It can even be argued that such a use of the term "all Israel" would run counter to Paul's instruction that the Gentiles not boast, since it could enable the Gentiles to argue that they are the "true Israel."

While View C is unlikely in the stated respects, it is not an oddity and is not totally out of the question. "Israel" *is* used in two different senses in a single verse (9:6) without warning or explanation. Can we rule out a similar tactic here? Also, in 9:24–29 Paul does speak of Jews and Gentiles together in the context of the remnant. In 10:12–13 he declares that no distinction can be made between Jews and Gentiles with regard to salvation. In 11:17–24 the olive tree contains both Jews and Gentiles, and even v. 25 refers to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, at least by implication.

This leads to an examination of the arguments for View B. When Paul says that "all Israel will be saved," he is speaking of all ethnic Jews who also belong to the true spiritual Israel. The first argument for this view is that it is consistent with the way Paul uses the term "Israel" in chs. 9–11, and thus belies the criticism that View A is the

only view that interprets the term consistent with the context. To say that Paul uses this term elsewhere in this section only for ethnic Jews may be true; but that does not affect B, which agrees that v. 26a refers to ethnic Jews. The only issue is whether Paul uses the term only in the sense of the nation *as a whole*, and 9:6 shows that he does not. In 9:6 Paul uses the term “Israel” twice, first referring to the nation as a whole and then referring only to spiritual Israel, the remnant. In the Greek text of 9:6 these two uses are almost consecutive, being separated by only one Greek word. Thus 9:6 is more than enough justification for regarding “Israel” in 11:26a as referring to spiritual Israel, even though the same term in 11:25 refers to Israel as a whole.

The second argument for B is that it is totally consistent with the context in general. Proponents of A say that v. 26a must be talking about the nation as a whole, because the status of the nation as a whole is exactly what 9–11 is all about: How can we reconcile Israel’s lostness with God’s faithfulness? But this is not the whole picture. It is true that in 9–11 the unbelief of Israel in general is the *problem*, but it is also true that the existence of a remnant who believe is part of the *answer* to the problem. Hence the remnant concept is a prominent theme in the context as a whole. See especially 9:6, 23–29; 11:1–7a.

Third, this view (B) is also consistent with the line of thought Paul is developing in ch. 11 specifically. Has God rejected his people? No. Though most are hardened, he has a remnant. But is there any hope for those who are hardened? Yes. Especially now that salvation has come to the Gentiles, all hardened Jews may believe in Jesus and *become a part of the remnant*. Paul has just declared that God can and will graft the broken-off branches back into the olive tree, conditioned upon their abandoning their unbelief (v. 23). In v. 24 Paul assures us that God *will* graft these natural branches back into the tree, but the condition of faith is obviously meant to be carried over from v. 23. The same is undoubtedly true in v. 26. When Paul says, “All Israel will be saved,” in view of v. 23 we must understand it as “all Israelites who believe in Jesus Christ—*i.e.*, the remnant—will be saved.” This shows the importance of translating *houtōs* as “thus, in this way.” When Paul says “in this way” all Israel will be saved, he is referring not just to the summary statement in v. 25, but to the more complete explanation in vv. 11–24, including the emphasis on conditionality in vv. 23–24.

A fourth argument for B is that it does justice to the word “all” in “all Israel.” One of the most serious flaws of A is that it really does not take the word “all” seriously. In practically every version of it, the only Jews who are saved are those who happen to be living at and possibly after a point of time still in the future, and for many it is only that final generation of Jews who are saved. Most individual Jews in the scores of generations preceding that time are actually *not* saved. Thus the saved “will be just a fragment of the total number of Jews who have lived on the earth. How can such a fragment properly be called ‘all Israel’?” If the issue here is God’s faithfulness to his promises to the Jews, how is the saving of just one generation evidence of such faithfulness? Did he make these promises only to a coming generation of Jews? Did he not make them to past generations of Jews? In what way does the salvation of a coming mass of Jews vindicate God’s faithfulness? But if “all Israel” means “the entire remnant of Jews,” then this refers to *every* believing Israelite in *every* generation. *All* who meet the condition of v. 23 will be saved.

A fifth argument for View B is that it is consistent with Paul’s teaching in the following verses that “all Israel” is being saved *now*. As we shall soon see, the Old Testament texts cited as confirmation of v. 26a refer to the *first* coming of Jesus and to the present salvation from sin by God’s grace. They do not refer to the Second Coming and to some future national restoration. Especially, in v. 31 Paul says it is God’s plan that the Jews “may *now* receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you [Gentiles].” View A does not do justice to this “now,” but B does.

A final question in reference to “all Israel will be saved” is the meaning of “saved.” At stake is whether this salvation includes something special for the Jews, or whether Paul is referring simply to the ordinary salvation from sin enjoyed by Gentile believers as well. Those who hold to the eschatological version of View A usually take the former approach, saying that this salvation includes the restoration of Israel as a political entity to its original Palestinian homeland as a preparation for the millennium. Almost everyone else, though, in view of vv. 26b–27, understands “saved” to mean the ordinary way of salvation that Paul has been expounding throughout Romans. It is

salvation from sin through faith in Christ. It is not a national salvation, for nothing is said about either a political entity or a return to the land. If this is the case, how does the salvation of all remnant Israel depend on the fullness of the Gentiles? While some attribute it to the envy of the Jews, it is just as reasonable or more reasonable that it must involve nothing short of the faithful preaching of the gospel by the Gentiles to the Jews.

In vv. 26b-27 Paul provides Old Testament confirmation that God is now saving all Israel through the gospel of Jesus Christ. These lines are taken from the *LXX* version of Isaiah. Verse 26b is basically the same as Isa. 59:20; v. 27a is from Isa. 59:21a; v. 27b is from Isa 27:9. In the last citation Paul changes “his sin” to “their sins.” The phrase “from Zion” also represents a change. The Hebrew text here reads “*to Zion*”; the *LXX* has “*for the sake of Zion*”; but Paul says “*from Zion*.” The fact that salvation comes “from Zion” is specifically mentioned in Ps 14:7; 53:6; 110:2. Paul chooses to incorporate this thought into his Old Testament citation in order to make his point more clearly.

The word for “deliverer” is a participial form of the verb *ryomai*, which means “to save, to rescue, to deliver.” The Hebrew text has *go’el*, “Redeemer.” This originally would have been applied to Yahweh, but Paul’s use of it here shows it is definitely a messianic prophecy. The “deliverer” is Jesus Christ. See 1 Thess. 1:10. “Jacob” of course was the original name of Isaac’s favored son before it was changed to Israel. Old Testament poetic and prophetic literature often used it as a synonym for Israel when referring to the Jewish people. That is its meaning here. It simply means “Israel” or “the Jews.” “Zion” was one of the hills on which Jerusalem was built. It was used in the Old Testament as a poetic name for Jerusalem itself (*e.g.*, Ps. 48:2, 11–12; 51:18; 69:35), and often symbolically for the whole of Israel and the people of Israel (*e.g.*, Ps. 74:2; 78:68; 146:10; Isa. 1:27; 46:13). Sometimes the nuance was Zion (Jerusalem) as the location of the temple and thus the dwelling place of God (*e.g.*, Ps. 76:2; 132:13; Isa. 8:18; 18:7; 24:23; Jer. 2:19; Joel 3:17, 21). In this way “Zion” came to represent heaven itself as God’s dwelling place (*e.g.*, Ps. 9:11; 14:7; 20:2; 50:2; 53:6; 110:2; 134:3).

In the New Covenant era “Zion” represents the new temple, the new people of God, the church. Messianic prophecies about Zion, such as

Ps. 2:6 and Isa. 28:16 (see also Isa. 2:3 and Micah 4:2) could be referring to the fact that the church was established in the earthly city of Jerusalem (Acts 2), from which the gospel then was taken into all the earth. But these texts could also be referring to the church itself, which seems more likely in view of Rom. 9:33; Heb. 12:22–23; and 1 Pet. 2:6. See also Gal. 4:26.

How does Paul intend for us to understand “from Zion” in this quote from Isa 59:20? Possibly it just means “Israel,” i.e., Christ came forth from the people of Israel. Or it may mean “Jerusalem” in the sense that this is where the church and the preaching of the gospel originated. Most likely, though, it means Zion as God’s heavenly dwelling place, i.e., God the Redeemer will come forth from heaven itself.

It makes a considerable difference whether this refers to the Messiah’s first coming or his second coming. If it is the latter, this would give support to the eschatological version of view A above. Paul would be saying that all Israel will be saved when the Messiah returns from heaven.

To the contrary, this refers to the first coming of Christ. It is in future tense (“will come”) from Isaiah’s standpoint, not Paul’s. Christ’s first coming was just as much from the heavenly Zion as the second will be. The strongest reason for taking it to be the first coming is the specific stated *purpose* for which the Redeemer comes from Zion. The redemptive acts mentioned by Isaiah and recited by Paul refer not to a political restoration of the Jewish nation but to the personal salvation of individuals. This is why Jesus came the first time: to die for the sins of his people, and thereby to establish a new covenant with them, a covenant to take away their sins.

Specifically the deliverer has come to “turn godlessness away from Jacob” (v. 26b) and to “take away their sins” (v. 27b). This is the saving grace of forgiveness (justification), regeneration, and sanctification. It is a *spiritual* restoration, not a political one. This is the very thing Peter preached to the Jews in his second sermon in Acts: “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (3:26). This

taking away of sins, says Isaiah, is the purpose and result of God's "covenant with them."

Of which covenant is Isaiah speaking? Some assume it is the covenant God made with Abraham and his physical seed, the Jewish nation. From this they conclude that God has promised salvation to the Jews as a nation, and that for this covenant to be fulfilled God must ultimately bring about the future restoration of Israel. This is completely off the mark, however. The covenant with Abraham *was* with the *nation* of Israel as a whole, but its promises were principally temporal blessings relating to Israel's role of bringing the Messiah into the world (9:4–5), not the spiritual blessings of salvation as such. *I.e.*, the Abrahamic covenant did not guarantee salvation to every Jew living under it. Also, the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled with the first coming of Christ.

The covenant to which Isaiah's messianic prophecy refers is thus not the Abrahamic covenant, but the New Covenant prophesied in Jer. 31:31–34, and established through the death and shed blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:7–12; 10:15–17). The central promise of the New Covenant, as stated in Jer. 31:34, is this: "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." This is exactly what Paul is emphasizing in his quote from Isaiah: God covenants to take away the sins of "all Israel" through the blood of Christ if they will but trust in him. This covenant is conditional (11:23), and God gathers Jews into it one by one over the whole course of church history. This is how all true Israel will be saved.

In vv. 28–29, Paul, speaking of the Jews, continues to address the Gentiles, explaining the reason why God salvation is offered to "all Israel." V. 28 speaks of the tension within God's nature that sums up God's relation to all sin and all sinners, *i.e.*, the tension between his holiness and his love. This is seen in a special way in his attitude toward the Jews; they are at the same time his enemies and his beloved, the objects of both his hatred and his love.

The word *echthros* is usually translated "enemy" in the New Testament; it speaks of an attitude of enmity and hostility and hatred. The main point here is not the sinner's hatred of God, but God's hatred of the sinner, in contrast with his love for the sinner in v. 28b.

To be hated by God is to be under his wrath, rejected by him, and shut off from him. This divine hostility is not directed toward all Jews, but only toward those who have rejected the gospel. They are God's enemies "as far as the gospel is concerned," *i.e.*, because they have refused to accept the gospel and to believe in Jesus as their Messiah (9:30–10:21).

Paul never ceases to remind the Gentile Christians, however, that God's enmity toward the Jews has been the occasion for bringing the gospel to them. The Jews are enemies, yes; but they are enemies "on your account," for your sake, "in order to open His kingdom wide to you." See vv. 11, 12, 15.

But this is only part of the picture, and the lesser part at that. Even though the hardened Jews have chosen to become God's enemies by rejecting the gospel, *God still loves them* because of the original relationship he established with them through the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Thus he cannot forget them; he cannot pretend that this relationship never existed. Even if they no longer have a special role in God's ongoing plan, they still occupy a special place in his heart.

"As far as election is concerned" has been taken two ways. In vv. 5, 7 Paul uses this same term (*eklogē*, "election, choice") for the elect remnant; some interpret it this way here, saying that v. 28b refers only to the remnant within Israel, and thus limiting God's love to the elect alone. Others correctly interpret "election" here as referring to God's original choice of Abraham and through him of the entire nation of Israel. This is not an election of individuals to salvation, but the election of the Jews as a corporate body to covenant service, as in 9:11.

Thus, whereas v. 28a reflects the reality of ch. 10 above, v. 28b reflects the reality of ch. 9. God chose Israel as a nation to serve his special redemptive purposes, and poured out upon them his special covenant blessings. Even though this relationship did not automatically guarantee salvation to every individual Jew, God cannot help but regard every natural descendent of Abraham with a special affection. Thus for the Jews perhaps more than others, God is "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9,

NASB). That is why he wants to include them in his new covenant, the covenant of salvation (v. 27). God's enmity to the hardened Jews is real (v. 28a), but it does not cancel out his love for them. That all Israel is loved by God "on account of the fathers" does not mean that the patriarchs did anything to merit or deserve this continuing love for their descendants. Nor does it mean that God still has unfulfilled covenant obligations toward the fathers. This latter view is quite common, especially among those who believe there is just one covenant of salvation, beginning with Abraham and continuing through the New Testament era. According to this view, this is why God still loves the Jews and *must* save them, *i.e.*, because His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is sovereign and unchangeable. They claim that when the Lord "elected" the nation of Israel to be His own people, He bound Himself by His own promises to bring the Jews to salvation and be forever His beloved and holy people. They proclaim that God has not suspended or rescinded his relation to Israel as his chosen people in terms of the covenants made with the fathers, and this is why he will save and restore them.

This view errs in thinking that the covenant with the patriarchs is the same as the covenant of salvation Jesus established on the cross. Thus it errs in thinking that the patriarchal covenant promised salvation to Jews as Jews in perpetuity. The truth is that every promise to Israel as a nation through the patriarchs was completely fulfilled when Jesus came into the world the first time (9:4–5; Acts 13:32–34).

V. 29 does not contradict what Paul says in v. 28 -- for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. This refers still to God's original general election of the nation of Israel. The "gifts" are not the gifts of salvation. They are the benefits described in 9:4–5, which, though glorious in every respect, are still temporal and unrelated to salvation in themselves. The "call" likewise is not the saving call to which only the elect respond, as in 8:30. It refers to the original call to Abraham and thus the call to Israel as a nation to be His special people, to stand in a special relation to Himself, and to fulfill a special function in history.

These gifts and this call are "irrevocable," Paul says. This is the first word in the verse in the Greek text and therefore is in a place of emphasis. What does it mean? It comes from *metamelomai*, which

means “to regret, to repent, to change one’s mind.” Here, with the negating alpha, the word is *ametamelētos*, “not to be regretted, not to be repented of.” (See 2 Cor. 7:10.) “Irrevocable” is not the best translation. The point is not that God must save the Jews because he has made an irrevocable promise to Abraham *et al.* to do so. Rather, it is that God does not regret his choice of Israel as the nation through whom he brought the Christ into the world. Despite the centuries of their heartbreaking unfaithfulness and idolatry in Old Testament times, and despite their current rejection of the gospel, God does not regret all he did for them and through them to carry out his purposes. This is why they are still beloved to him. Paul begins this thought with *ga*, (“for, because”). The Jews are still beloved because of the patriarchs (v. 28b), because God has never regretted this Old Covenant relationship he established with them in the first place. Their fathers were chosen and loved, and on their account their rejected descendants are still loved.

In vv. 30-32 Paul declares that God’s ultimate purpose is mercy. In describing God’s dealings with the Jews and Gentiles, this chapter has strongly emphasized both sides of God’s nature: his sternness and his kindness (v. 22), his enmity and his love (v. 28). It has not attempted to soften or disguise the wrath of God against the unbelieving Jews (vv. 7–10, 19–22, 28a). But this is not the main point of the chapter. The main point is that, in spite of the unbelief and disobedience of Gentiles and Jews alike, God wants the gracious side of his nature to prevail. His ultimate goal and purpose are *mercy*, not wrath. And the most marvelous thing of all is that God can use the universal disobedience of mankind as a part of his plan to show mercy unto all. By explaining how this is so, this paragraph is a striking example of 8:28.

The parts of vv. 30-31 are so carefully composed and so deliberately parallel that both must be read together – “Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.” One writer said of these two verses that it is the most contrived or carefully constructed formulation which Paul ever produced in such tight epigrammatic form, with so many balancing elements. It may be diagrammed thus:

For just as YOU GENTILES
then were disobedient to God, but
now have received mercy
by the JEWS' disobedience;
So also THESE JEWS
now have become disobedient, so that
now they also may receive mercy
by the mercy shown to you GENTILES.

In a real sense this sentence sums up everything Paul has said in this chapter. Ver. 30 describes the rebellion of the Gentiles, then their salvation determined by the rebellion of the Jews; and ver. 31, the rebellion of the Jews, then their salvation arising from the salvation of the Gentiles.

The word *pote*, (“then, at one time,”) in v. 30a refers to the pre-Christian era when the Gentiles were limited to general revelation and were given over to the sinful excesses of their rebellion against God (1:18–32). The word *nyn* (“now”) in v. 30b refers to the New Covenant era when Christ has commanded that the gospel be taken to all nations. The contrast is not between disobedience and obedience, as if one could make up for his sins by beginning to obey the commandments of the law. As in 3:21–5:21, the only remedy for disobedience is the mercy and grace of God.

To say that the Gentiles have received mercy “as a result of their [the Jews’] disobedience” is simply to repeat vv. 11, 12, 15. God takes the Jews’ rebellion against the gospel of Christ as an occasion for sending that gospel to the Gentiles.

These verses continue to undermine Gentile smugness in relation to the Jews. Paul reminds the Gentiles (1) that they too were once in a state of disobedience; (2) that in one sense they owe their present state of grace to the Jews’ disobedience; and (3) that God’s plan is for the Jews to ultimately receive the same mercy now enjoyed by the Gentiles, even though they will arrive at it by a slightly different route. To say that the Jews “have now become disobedient” refers to their initial rejection of the gospel at the beginning of the New Covenant era.

The word translated “in order that” is *hina*. It usually denotes purpose, as the NIV chooses to translate it here. But if that is what it means here, this would suggest that somehow God *caused* the Jews to be disobedient, *so that* he might accomplish the stated purpose. Thus it is important to know two things about *hina*. First, it can denote simple result rather than purpose. Also, contrary to regular usage *hina* sometimes is placed elsewhere than at the beginning of its clause, in order to emphasize the words that come before it. Both of these points are in evidence here in v. 31b. Note especially that, for emphasis, “by your [the Gentiles’] mercy” is placed at the very beginning of this clause, even before the word *hina*. Taken thus it reads quite naturally as follows: “The Jews have now become disobedient, with the result that, *by means of the mercy shown to you Gentiles*, they too may now obtain mercy.”

This shows that God’s ultimate goal, even for the hardened Jews, is that they may receive his mercy and be saved. It also emphasizes again that the salvation of the Gentiles is an instrument by which God will bring this about. This recalls the point about the Jews’ being moved to envy by seeing the Gentiles enjoying the fruit of their own covenant service (vv. 11, 13–14). It is also an incentive for Gentile Christians to evangelize the Jews.

The inclusion of the word “now” in v. 31b is very significant. It shows that the statement, “And so all Israel will be saved” in v. 26a does not refer to a mass conversion of ethnic Jews at some far distant point in the future (relative to the time of Paul’s writing), but that it refers to the ongoing conversion of remnant Jews beginning even “now,” in the first century. Those who take the former view give “now” some other meaning, such as “at any time,” or “the eschatological now,” *i.e.*, sometime during this final messianic age, even if it is toward the end of it. But the parallel with the “now” in v. 30b shows that Paul is thinking of the “now” in which he was living. Thus it indicates a steady flow of Jews into the church, by grace through faith, from that very time.

In the final verse (v. 32) of the present section Paul emphasizes once again that God’s goal and purpose are to bring mercy to all. The “all” in both clauses probably is not intended to refer to every individual as such, but to all in the sense of both *groups*, *i.e.*, both Gentiles and

Jews. To say God has bound all over to disobedience reflects Paul's emphasis in 3:9, that "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (see 3:9–20). The reference to God's "mercy on them all" does not teach universal salvation, but refers to the fact that he has poured out his mercy on Jews and Gentiles alike (10:12).

As a matter of fact, though, all individuals in both groups *are* bound over to sin (3:23). Also, there is a sense in which God has mercy on all individuals, in that his mercy is intended for all and is offered to all. It is not the case, though, that all will in fact accept it. Whether the mercy will ever be actually realized or not, depends on belief in Christ.

The word translated "bound over" literally means "to enclose, to confine, to shut up, to imprison." How did God imprison the Gentiles in disobedience? This does not mean that he caused them to sin, or made it impossible for them not to sin. It refers to 1:18–32, and to God's decision to "give them over" to the sinful desires of their hearts (vv. 24, 26, 28). How did he imprison the Jews in disobedience? Again this does not mean he caused them to sin. It refers rather to 2:1–29, and to the conclusion that the law, in which the Jews trusted, has but one verdict for sinners: condemnation. It refers also to 11:7 and the hardening of Jewish unbelievers. All in all this statement refers to God's decision to 'confine' people in the state that they have chosen for themselves.

From another standpoint, to say that God shuts up all men in their sin refers to the divine pronouncement that all have in fact sinned (3:23) and have become trapped in the consequences of their sin with no hope of escaping through any deeds or schemes of their own. "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (3:20, NASB). For sinners this is what it means to be "under law" (6:14, 15). For sinners the testimony of the law is a word of wrath. This word of wrath is like cords that bind sinners and leave them shut up in the dungeon of death, in the very vestibule of hell.

But this is not the last word, because God has provided a way of escape from this dungeon, this prison of sin. It is the way of mercy, the way of grace (3:21–5:21); and it is the *only* way. This is the whole point of Romans: "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (3:28, NASB). "We are not under law but under grace" (6:15).

This is the point to which all of ch. 11 has been leading: that God can and will provide this mercy to all, Jews and Gentiles alike. As they have been together in the prison of their disobedience, so they will be together in the freedom of God's mercy.

The Doxology that concludes this chapter is one of the most beautiful passages in scripture. How Paul's heart must have been beating when he wrote it. How challenging it is to those who would worship God. With his faith Paul reaches out to God. By his love for God Paul is moved to reach out to mankind. Because of his debt to Him who loved him, gave Himself for him, and called him to service, Paul gives himself in God's service while looking forward to the fulfillment of his desire to depart and be with Christ. May we indeed follow Paul as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).