

“He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not?” (Romans 11:1–36)

Frederick the Great was the King of Prussia. Two hundred and fifty years ago he and his chaplain were discussing the Bible and whether or not it was true. Frederick the Great asked his chaplain, “Can you prove to me in one sentence that the Bible is true?” After thinking about it for a while the chaplain said, “I don’t need an entire sentence. I only need two words to prove that the Bible is true and that God doesn’t lie. Those two words are ‘The Jews!’” What a perfect response! God has miraculously preserved the Jewish people for millennia despite hatred, opposition, and persecution.

Have you ever questioned God’s love for you? Have you ever felt forsaken by God? I have two words for you: The Jews. As we consider the past and present rejection of Israel, we must ask such questions as: Has God’s love for Israel been quenched? Have His purposes for Israel been shelved? What about all the blessings promised to the nation that have not been fulfilled? An even more relevant question is: How can I, as a Gentile Christian trust the promises of God, when God was not able to fulfill His Word to Israel? Rom 11 tell us that Israel still has a great future in God’s plan. The reason is simple: *God keeps His promises despite our failures.* Rom 11 makes three declarations.

1. God’s people are chosen by grace (11:1–10).¹ God has demonstrated a *past* commitment to Israel.² But Israel’s incessant rebellion and rejection of Christ (cf. 10:21) causes Paul to ask: **“I say then, God has not rejected His people,³ has He?”** (11:1a).⁴ This question is not really a question; it’s a statement of fact. Therefore, Paul responds with an emphatic, **“May it never be!”**⁵ How can Paul be so certain that God hasn’t rejected His people? Paul states his first line of evidence in 11:1b: **“For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”**⁶ Paul’s point is that if God can save a hardhearted man like himself He can save anyone! Since Paul was able to believe in Christ, he can confidently say, **“God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew”** (11:2a).⁷ The very fact of God’s choice excludes the possibility of His desertion of His own people.⁸ It’s not a matter of God rejecting Israel; rather, Israel as a whole has turned her back on God (cf. 10:18–21). Paul states that God “foreknew” (*proginosko*) His people.⁹ This means that God chose Israel to be His people in a corporate sense;¹⁰ however, He also elects individuals to justification-salvation to preserve the nation.¹¹

Paul gives a second illustration to demonstrate that God hasn’t rejected Israel. In 11:2b–4 Paul writes, **“Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ‘Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.’¹² But what is the divine response¹³ to him?¹⁴ ‘I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.’”**¹⁵ Paul is not the lone exception; even in Elijah’s day God had a remnant. Paul’s point that a remnant exists demonstrates that God has not abandoned His plan for the nation. This leads to an important principle: God does His best work through a remnant, a faithful minority.¹⁶ Today, you may feel alone and discouraged. The good news is that you’re not alone. Be encouraged—you have brothers and sisters in Christ in your county, throughout your country, and all over the world. This has always been the case, and it will always be the case. God preserves a remnant.

Through these two illustrations Paul has demonstrated that God’s program still includes Israel. Now, in 11:5–6 he applies what he’s been illustrating: **“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.¹⁷ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works,¹⁸ otherwise grace is no longer grace.”**¹⁹ Israel as a whole did not attain to God’s righteousness because they sought it by works. The elect remnant, however, did attain to God’s righteousness, but it was solely out of grace—God giving what is not deserved.²⁰ The point is: Grace and works are mutually exclusive. God’s election was (and is) established solely on the basis of grace. Verse 6 is a critical New Testament principle: Justification and sanctification are by grace.

After explaining the positive privilege of the elect, Paul explains the negative judgment on the rest of Israel. In 11:7–10 he writes, **“What then?²¹ What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, ‘GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.’²² And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.’ ‘LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER²³ [“continually,” NET; HCSB²⁴].”** Israel is guilty of seeking religion apart from a relationship with Christ. Fortunately, God has “chosen” individuals from among the nation to believe in Jesus. The rest were “hardened.”²⁵ God simply allowed the hardness of their hearts to run its natural course.²⁶ These verses are not in reference to an unbeliever who has never heard, but of a religious unbeliever.²⁷ Thus, they serve as a warning to unbelieving church attendees not to grow hardhearted. The principle of “hardening” is like dieting—weight is easy to put on but is difficult to take off. The longer you harden your heart, the more unlikely it is that you will ever respond to Christ. So please trust in Him today. Tomorrow may never come.

The blessings (cf. 9:4–6) God gave Israel turned into burdens and judgments (11:9–10). The picture is of a well-laid, prosperous feast. But the very prosperity of the household turns out to be a curse. Their religious practices and observances became substitutes for the real experience of salvation. As a result, Israel has been darkened. Those who do not wish to see become even less able to see. The figure of bent backs (11:10) is a picture of an elderly person with weakened faculties and lost vigor and energy. The old person is decrepit and crippled, without the ability to care for himself. It is a picture of what Israel became once God allowed the nation to fall into hardness and spiritual blindness.²⁸ Fortunately, great good has come out of this bleak situation, as we will see in the next section.

[Paul’s first declaration is God’s people are chosen by grace. Now we learn that . . .]

2. Grace should keep God’s people humble (11:11–32).²⁹ God has a *present* and *future* plan for Israel³⁰ and Gentiles.³¹ Israel’s rejection of Christ has made it possible for Gentiles to be included in God’s family. This gracious invitation ought to humble us to dust! In 11:11–15 Paul writes, **“I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles,³² I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world,³³ what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”**³⁴ The obvious question from 11:7–10 is: If Israel has rejected Christ, is their rejection final? Again Paul declares, “May it never be!” Israel’s failure is not final. There is a future for Israel. Paul calls it their “fulfillment” (11:12) and their “acceptance” (11:15). Today, Israel is fallen spiritually, but when Christ returns the nation will rise again. Today, Israel is cast away from God, but one day they will be accepted again. God will never break His covenant with His people, and He has promised to restore them.³⁵ In the interim, God is so sovereign that He welcomes Gentiles into His family to make Israel jealous (11:11, 15). Have you ever watched a young child who tires of playing with a toy, only to become jealous when another child comes along and picks it up? The first child had no interest in the toy until some other child wanted to play with it. Similarly, as Gentiles experience “salvation” (i.e., justification and sanctification)³⁶ Israel will eventually grow jealous and believe in Christ as messiah.³⁷

Applicationally, do you make both Jews and Gentiles thirsty for Jesus? Does your life make anyone hungry to know the Lord? Do you exhibit such joy that people want to know where it comes from? The phrase “life from the dead” likely refers to the spiritual awakening of the whole world.³⁸ If Israel’s rejection by God brought the reconciliation of the world, then Israel’s acceptance by God will make the world alive spiritually.³⁹

In 11:16–17 Paul brings us into his kitchen and into his backyard for two metaphors intended to illustrate Israel’s glorious return and to humble Gentiles. He writes: **“If the first piece of dough is holy,⁴⁰ the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree.”** The term “holy” (*hagios*) means “to be set apart for special use” or “consecrated to the service of God.” The entire nation of Israel is “holy” not because each Jew is experiencing salvation but because the nation is under God’s special care as He plans to fulfill the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁴¹ *God keeps His promises despite our failures.*

The Metaphors Identified in Rom 11:16–17

The first piece/lump ⁴²	The Jewish fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
The root	Abraham
The lump/the branches	Israelites
The wild olive	Gentiles
The olive tree ⁴³	The promises of the Abrahamic covenant

In 11:18–21 Paul responds to the potential question: Do Gentiles receive the graft or the shaft? He warns his Gentile readers: **“... do not be arrogant⁴⁴ toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I⁴⁵ might be grafted in.’ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.”** Paul is saying: “Remember your roots and that your roots support you.⁴⁶ In 11:18–19 Paul makes it clear that salvation is of the Jews,⁴⁷ therefore, Gentiles best not mess with Jews. After all, Gentiles have been grafted in. Gentile Christians were never the “pioneers” of salvation. They were favored only by Israel’s foolishness. Only faith will preserve their future as God’s people. I am reminded of the relationship between a flea and a dog. Israel is the dog and the flea is a Gentile Christian. How foolish for the flea to despise the dog and to suppose that the dog is dependent on him. All the flea does for the dog is make him itch. All the Gentile does for the Jewish unbeliever is make him jealous. How foolish for the flea to look down on the dog. How foolish for Gentiles to disdain the Jews!⁴⁸ We ought to be the most humble people on the earth. We should be astounded that God chose to include us at all. The moment you become proud of grace you are in great danger. We must “fear.” No one knows the grace of God who does not know the fear of God.

This fear is further accentuated in 11:22 where Paul makes the startling point that if Gentiles follow the path of the Jews they will be “cut off”:⁴⁹ **“Behold then the kindness and severity of God;⁵⁰ to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.”** This is not the loss of salvation but the cutting off of a group (Gentiles). Rom 11 deals with the problem that the community of Israel as a whole had lapsed from a position of God’s blessing.⁵¹ In this context, to be cut off is to become like Israel and not be a major player in God’s program. It is to lose the national blessings that result in salvation. None of this impinges on the security of an individual believer. We have a similar episode in Rev 2:5 where the church of Ephesus as a whole is being addressed. Here, John records that Jesus has something against the church of Ephesus. He states that they have left their first love. As a result Jesus says, “I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place.” The removal of the lampstand is not the loss of salvation of individual Christians; it is the removal of the corporate church as a light and witness. Today every single one of the seven churches of Revelation has ceased to exist. Once the Muslims conquered Turkey, Christianity virtually disappeared. We too must heed Paul’s warning. This fate could happen to our church and to the church in America. America is not God’s “chosen nation”—Israel is. God isn’t required to always work with America. He can set aside America because of her pride.⁵² We must pray for national humility and confession of sin.

In 11:23–24 Paul returns to the theme of God’s commitment to Israel: **“And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?”** Paul has said that God has grafted Gentiles into the benefit of the Abrahamic covenant (11:16–22). Now he states that someday God will graft Israel in again (11:23–24). Paul described this “grafting in” as contrary to nature. Usually a cultivated branch is grafted into a wild tree and shares its life without producing its poor fruit. But in this case, it was the “wild branch” (the Gentiles) that was grafted into the good tree and then bore fruit! C. S. Lewis said it best, “In a sense, the converted Jew is the only normal human being in the world.” *God keeps His promises despite our failures.*

In light of these verses, several applications come to mind: (1) We must be grateful and affirming toward Christians Jews. There should be no expression of pride or disdain. On the contrary, we should acknowledge that the Bible is a Jewish book, Jesus is a Jewish messiah, and the Jews are God’s chosen people. (2) We need to remember that grace reaches unlikely people. God is always full of surprises! We should, therefore, share Christ freely. (3) We must not give up on “hard” people. It’s been said, “The bigger they are . . . the harder they fall.” This can be especially true when it comes to simple rejecters of Jesus Christ (just ask Paul). May we passionately share Christ with Jews and Gentiles alike.

In 11:25–32 Paul explains that the same mercy that has overtaken the Gentiles who were formerly disobedient will finally overtake the now disobedient Israel.⁵³ In 11:25–27 Paul writes: **“For I do not want you, brethren,⁵⁴ to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved;⁵⁵ just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB,’⁵⁶ ‘THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’”⁵⁷** Whereas Paul has explained the human side of Israel’s rejection because of her disobedience, there is another side to this phenomenon, a divine side, yet unknown to his readers. Paul calls it a “mystery.”⁵⁸ A biblical mystery is not like Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie. Rather, it is a truth that was unknown in the Old Testament that is now being revealed in the New Testament.⁵⁹ Here, the “mystery” is that Israel’s restoration will follow a great response of faith among Gentiles.⁶⁰ Paul is referring to the hardening of Israel, which is permitted “until” the Gentiles enter into a relationship with Christ. The expression “the fullness of the Gentiles” refers to the total number of Gentiles who will be included in God’s program during the time of Israel’s hardening. God has a precise number of Gentiles that He is going to save. We don’t know when the last Gentile will be saved. But what is exciting is: The final Gentile conversion could occur at your church on any given Sunday. The moment this person believes in Christ, the rapture could occur and Jesus could take the Church to be with Him always. After this “fullness of the Gentiles”⁶¹ has come in, then “all Israel will be saved.”⁶² The expression “all Israel will be saved” does not mean that every individual in the nation will turn to the Lord. It means that the nation as a whole will be saved,⁶³ just as the nation as a whole (but not every individual in it) was rejecting the Lord. The purpose, then, for which Paul is expounding this mystery, is to prevent pride and to bring about humility on the part of the Gentile believers in Rome.

Now Paul writes in 11:28–29: **“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”** God has chosen Israel and He loves His people. Hence, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,” which means “not to repent.”⁶⁴ God does not change His mind. He made promises to Israel and He will fulfill them. The special privileges that God gave Israel are probably what Paul intended by his reference to God’s gifts (cf. 9:4–5). They have intimate connection with God’s calling of Israel for a special purpose. God will not withdraw these from Israel. Paul said virtually the same thing about the security of individual Christians in 8:31–39.⁶⁵

In 11:30–32 Paul concludes this lengthy section by focusing on the mercy of God: **“For just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their [Israel’s] disobedience, so these [Israel] also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you [Gentiles] they [Israel] also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all [Jew and Gentile] in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”**⁶⁶ It is God’s mercy (four times) that permits anyone to be saved. Paul points out that Israel was active in their disobedience but they passively received mercy from God. Mercy is a gift that we don’t deserve. Jewish disobedience sped up the process of the gospel going to Gentiles.⁶⁷ Israel delayed God’s promises. When you live a life of disobedience to God, you put off the benefits of the promises; you do not cancel them. God’s promises are always valid; your participation in those promises may not be. Obedience is always critical because it makes what is supposed to happen always happen at the time it is supposed to happen so you don’t waste precious time waiting for it to happen.⁶⁸ *God keeps His promises despite our failures.*

[Paul’s second declaration was: Grace should keep God’s people humble. His final declaration is . . .]

3. God’s people should glory in His grace (11:33–36). After eleven chapters of theology, Paul closes with doxology, which is an ascription of praise or glory to God. What an appropriate finale of the doctrinal portion of Romans. Slowly read 11:33–36: **“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!⁶⁹ How unsearchable⁷⁰ are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?⁷¹ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?⁷² For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”**⁷³ For Paul theology isn’t dry, dull, or boring; rather it stimulated worship! Paul gets excited over theology!⁷⁴ He bursts into praise when he grasped God’s plan for the future. The apostle says, “What a God! What a plan!” God’s dealings with humanity are designed to stimulate worship of His glory, not questioning of His methods.⁷⁵ God would not be worthy of man’s worship if He could be comprehended by man’s wisdom. God’s Word is designed to ignite a fire in you! God is the first cause—the source (“from Him”); He is the effective cause—the sustainer (“through Him”); and He is the final cause—the goal (“to Him”). Why are you living? It ought to be: “from Him . . . through Him . . . to Him!” God wants to totally possess your entire being. “From Him”: how does He want me to live? “Through Him”: He empowers me to live. “To Him”: why are you living? To bring glory to Him! This is the whole gist of Scripture! We exist for God’s glory!

I’m holding a bagel in my hand. The humble bagel is one of God’s greatest creations. You make it by first dipping the dough in boiling water and then cooking it. You can get bagels in almost every flavor—onion, garlic, rock salt, pumpernickel, poppy-seed, or in trendy flavors like apple-cinnamon, banana-nut, or chocolate chip. I am holding one of my personal favorites: a jalapeno bagel. I think all God’s people should wake up every Sunday morning and enjoy a bagel lavishly spread with cream cheese to the glory of God! Bagels are a uniquely Jewish creation. You will find them almost everywhere in the world because you can find Jewish people almost everywhere. The bagel is a symbol of God’s faithfulness! Even after all the attempts to destroy them—the Jews are still here. And they’re still making bagels for the world: proof positive that God keeps His promises.⁷⁶ *God keeps His promises despite our failures.*

This chapter ought to be a great comfort to you because it demonstrates the unconditional love and acceptance of God. He is a covenant-keeping God who is forever faithful. He is the ultimate “promise keeper.” Therefore, if He is faithful to Israel, He will be faithful to us. We can trust Him with our eternal salvation and with life’s every need. How can you say “no” to a love like that?

Scripture References

Romans 11:1–36

Exodus 34:6–7

1 Samuel 12:22

Amos 3:2

1 Corinthians 1:26–30

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Isaiah 40:12–13

Study Questions

1. When have I felt rejected by God (Rom 11:1–2)? What led to these intense feelings? How did I respond to this crisis of faith? Why is it so easy to doubt God's love and commitment? How can I comfort and encourage a fellow believer who struggles with doubt and fear about his/her relationship with God?
2. Why have God's people down throughout the ages consisted of a mere remnant (Rom 11:2–6)? What is the reason that more individuals are not a part of the family of God (11:7–10)? When I feel alone and discouraged, how can I find comfort in God's remnant?
3. What should my attitude toward the Jews be in light of my own engrafting in this root (Rom 11:16–24)? How has God displayed His mercy to both Jew and Gentile despite their disobedience (11:28–32)? How can I grow in my appreciation for God's grace?
4. How can a nation or a church lose its influence (Rom 11:20–22)? In what ways do I get used to enjoying the privileges of grace, and begin to think I deserve them? How can I guard myself against this kind of complacency or presumption? How can I help my brothers and sisters in Christ avoid this mindset?
5. How does Paul describe God in Rom 11:33–36? How does my present view of God measure up to this revelation? Why is 11:33–36 an appropriate response to 9:1–11:32? What can I do to ensure that my study of Scripture and theology lead to worship and awe?

Notes

¹ Cf. Rom 2:28–29; see also Acts 13:46; Jer 31:35–37.

² 1 Sam 12:22; Lam 3:32–32.

³ Most commentators recognize that Paul is talking about Israel as a whole and not only those from Israel who are believers. See Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 578.

⁴ Moo notes: “The question is certainly a natural one. Israel’s refusal to acknowledge Jesus Christ, the culmination of salvation history (10:4) and sole mediator of God’s righteousness (10:5–13), would seem to mean that she could no longer claim to be ‘God’s people.’ But, as in 3:1, where Paul raises a similar question, Paul refuses to admit the ‘logical’ conclusion. Despite her disobedience, Israel remains ‘the people of God’—in what sense, Paul will explain in the rest of the chapter.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 672–73.

⁵ Of the fourteen times Paul uses the exclamation *me genoito* (“May it never be!”), ten of them are in Romans (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11). Lopez rightly concludes, “Perhaps no other verse (except 11:11, 26) argues more strongly for a future assured for Israel than this one.” René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 220.

⁶ As Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 220 notes: “Paul’s certainty of God’s faithfulness to His word has deeply personal roots. His own conversion and blessing by God is proof enough to Paul that God has not completely abandoned Israel even in light of national discipline. If God could call Saul of Tarsus, a murderer and persecutor of Christians, into his Apostleship despite his failings and his shortcomings then clearly He could also bring Israel back from their apostasy. (so Stott, 292) Paul uses his own heritage, then, to prove that despite unfaithfulness on the part of people God remains completely faithful.”

⁷ Paul’s words may be an allusion to Ps 94:14 (cf. Deut 31:6; 1 Sam 12:22; 1 Kgs 6:13; Lam 3:31–32). Schreiner, *Romans*, 579, notes that the language here is very similar to 1 Sam 12:22 and Ps 94:14, which both promise that the Lord would not abandon His people. Paul reiterates here the truth of those verses. Schreiner (579–80) recounts the OT history behind the allusion: “The larger OT context of the passages cited is significant. In Samuel the people have abandoned the theocratic rule of God by asking for a king who will rule over them in accordance with the rule of kings over other nations. In 1 Sam. 12 the sins of Israel are rehearsed, but Samuel assures them that God will not forsake them. Similarly, Israel has sinned by rejecting the apostolic preaching that Jesus is the Messiah; nonetheless, God has not forsaken his people. The context of Ps. 94 is not as germane, but even in this instance the psalmist assures his readers that God will not abandon his people despite the oppression of wicked nations.”

⁸ Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 168. Ross writes, “If this means ‘to know beforehand’ that Israel would believe, then there is no problem in asking ‘Has God cast them away?’ But if it means ‘chosen,’ then there is a more significant matter. Does past election guarantee the future, with sin in between? The idea of foreknowledge means essentially ‘to enter into intimate relationship beforehand.’ Thus, Paul knows that God has a future goal based on love for the people of Israel—some future generation.” Allen Ross, “The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans” (Rom 11:1–36):

www.christianleadershipcenter.org/romans8.htm; accessed 12 June 2011.

⁹ Hoehner helpfully addresses the issues in interpretation: “Is ‘His people’ a reference to the nation of Israel in a general sense, or does it refer to the elect within the nation of Israel in a restrictive sense? Many think it refers to the nation as a whole. The reasons for this view are: (1) the whole context is about the status of the nation as a whole in 9:30–10:21 and about whom Paul asks in 11:1; (2) 11:28 speaks of the nation Israel as the enemy of the gospel and yet God’s choice; (3) it is stated that in the future all Israel will be saved (11:26); and (4) the nation is seen corporately in the rest of chapter 11.

Others propose that Paul is referring to a remnant within Israel because (1) the context states that not all Israel is Israel; (9:6–8); (2) 11:1 speaks of the example of Paul as one Israelite who is part of the remnant; (3) 11:2–4 refers to Elijah and the 7,000 who did not bow the knee to Baal; (4) 11:5 and 7 speaks of a remnant according to the election of grace known as His people in contrast to the rest of Israel who were hardened; and (5) the concept of ‘foreknowledge’ is consistent with 8:29 where those whom God foreknew are ultimately glorified. Hence, His people whom He foreknew are the remnant as opposed to the nation as a whole.” See Harold W. Hoehner, “Israel in Romans 9–11,” in *Israel: the Land and the People*. Edited by H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 150.

¹⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 674 comments on the clause *hon proegno* (“whom He foreknew”): “The relative clause Paul adds to this assertion—‘whom he foreknew’—does not simply define ‘his people’ but adds a reason for the assertion. For the ‘know’ in the verb ‘foreknow’ refers to God’s election: As Amos puts it, ‘You [people of

Israel] only have I known of all the families of the earth' (3:2a). The temporal prefix, 'fore'- (pro-), indicates further that God's choosing of Israel took place before any action or status on the part of Israel that might have qualified her for God's choice. How could God reject a people whom he in a gracious act of choice had made his own? As Paul has made clear earlier in the letter (3:3-4), human sinfulness and disobedience cannot cancel his pledged word."

¹¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 677–78; Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 221.

¹² A quotation from 1 Kgs 19:10, 14.

¹³ The noun *chrematismos* ("divine response") occurs only here in the NT. In classical literature the term means an "official answer, instruction, decree," and in Scripture "divine answer, response, oracle" (BDAG s.v. *chrematismos*).

¹⁴ Stott eloquently sums up the point: "... Israel's national apostasy was not complete. Although the doctrine of the remnant was not developed until Isaiah's time, the faithful remnant itself already existed during the prophetic ministry of Elijah at least a century earlier." John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 292.

¹⁵ A quotation from 1 Kgs 19:10, 14.

¹⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 224–25.

¹⁷ The noun *ekloge* ("choice") was used in classical times in the military and political arenas as "selection" and in biblical literature it continues to mean "selection, election, choosing," or in the passive sense "that which is chosen, selected" (BDAG s.v. *ekloge* 1–2). Hoehner writes, "When left by herself, Israel refused God's provision of salvation, but in his grace God left a remnant for himself. Paul will show later in this chapter that this is also true for the Gentiles [*leimma, ekloge*]." Harold W. Hoehner, "Romans" in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 184. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 221 writes: "It follows that God could not elect people on the basis of merit He foresaw in them (cf. 9:14–16). Nevertheless, God's criterion of election remains an undisclosed mystery in Scripture. To be elect is not synonymous with having eternal life. People still have to believe in Christ. Yet, being elect in this context guarantees, by God sovereign choice based on grace, one day that the person will believe."

¹⁸ Ash correctly notes: "When he says '... if by grace, then it is *no longer* by works' he cannot now mean that it used to be by works but the rules have now changed. This would contradict his points from 1 Kings 18, 1 Samuel 12 and Psalm 94 which highlight the victory of grace throughout the Old Testament period. He means we must 'no longer' make the mistake of thinking it is by works." Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 114.

¹⁹ Paul reiterates the truth that he taught in Rom 4:4–5, namely that our relationship with God is by grace not by works. Boa and Kruidenier note: "Paul never lets up on his preaching of the grace of God. Of the 119 mentions of grace in Acts to Revelation, 86 of them occur in Paul's epistles, with 21 of them in Romans." Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 335.

²⁰ Twenty-one times in the letter to the Romans Paul mentions grace (*charis* occurs twenty-four times, twice translated as "thanks" [6:17; 7:25] and once as 'gift' [4:4]).

²¹ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 221 reminds us that *Ti oun* ("What then") is a technical, transitional phrase that Paul uses to develop his argument further.

²² The primary verse being quoted, Deut 29:4 (cf. Isa 29:10), tells the story of Israel's experience in the desert and their continual unfaithfulness in the face of the miraculous provision of God. In spite of all of His provision for them, the Israelites proved unfaithful, and God responded in judgment by refusing to give them further understanding.

²³ A quotation from Ps 69:22–23. Hart notes that this psalm is quoted of the Messiah five times in the NT. John Hart, "The Letter to the Romans" unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

²⁴ Cranfield states: "The point here is not that the bowing down of the backs is to go on forever, but that so long as it does go on, it is not to be intermittent but continuous and sustained." C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. ICC series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 2:552.

²⁵ The verb translated "hardened" (*poroo*) is derived from the noun *poros*, which refers to a tough (porous) stone and means "to harden, to form a callous, and thus to petrify, to become hard" (NIDNTT s.v. *poroo* 2:153). Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 222 analyzes: "This hardening is not capricious, but results from people rejecting Christ (11:28). Scripture is clear that the hardening of a human heart by God never precedes that person's own hardening by rejecting God's revelation resulting in rebellion (Rom 9:17–18; cf. Isa 6:9–10; Mark 4:12; John 5:40; 12:40; Acts 28:26–27)."

²⁶ Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 206.

²⁷ Ash, *Teaching Romans, Vol. 2*, 116.

²⁸ Eaton, *Romans*, 207.

²⁹ See Mark 12:1–11; Rev 7:3–8.

³⁰ Isa 66:8; Zech 12:10; 13:1; 14:3–4; Matt 23:39.

³¹ See Acts 13:46: “Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’”

³² Paul felt uniquely called to minister to the Gentile world (cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Rom 1:5; 15:16; Gal 1:16; 2:7, 9; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 4:17).

³³ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 224 rightly states: “Reconciliation does not mean everyone is justified, but *justifiable* by simple faith alone in Christ alone.”

³⁴ Stott, *Romans*, 298–99 canvasses the interpretive options (literal [referring to the resurrection], spiritual [being “raised with Christ”], and figurative) and explains the best option in these words: “Paul foresees that ‘unimaginable blessing’ is going to enrich the Gentiles, a worldwide blessing which will so far surpass anything before experienced that it can only be likened to new life out of death. Perhaps Paul is taking a backward glance to Ezekiel’s vision, in which the restoration of Israel is depicted as the coming together of dead, dry bones which are then given both flesh and life. Does Paul now apply this vision to the Gentile world? Does he prophesy ‘a vast and intense revival of true religion from a state which, by comparison, was religious death’, ‘an unprecedented quickening for the world in the expansion and success of the gospel’? If God could use the tragedy of Israel’s rejection to bring salvation to the Gentiles, with what further blessing could he not enrich the world through Israel’s acceptance and fullness?”

³⁵ See Jer 31:35–37 where God links His promises to Israel to the sun, moon, and stars.

³⁶ The broad use of “salvation” (*soteria*) involves sanctification. This is confirmed through the use of the plural “riches” (*ploutos*), which refers to the enormous blessings that Gentiles possess (Osborne, *Romans*, 293; Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 223).

³⁷ Did you know that the vast majority of Jewish believers in the US have been led to Christ through Gentiles? Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Theology of Israel: A Study of Romans 9–11* (Tustin: Aerial Ministries, 1984), 20.

³⁸ Eaton writes, “The phrase ‘life from the dead’ has its closest parallel in Romans 6:13, which refers to spiritual liveliness. Romans 11:12 and 15 hold out the hope of a glorious latter-day outpouring of the Spirit upon the church. Many gentile nations will have come in before Israel’s conversion (as 11:26 will suggest).” Michael Eaton, *Romans: A Practical Exposition*, forthcoming.

³⁹ See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 411; Hoehner, “Israel in Romans 9–11,” 152; Ash, *Teaching Romans, Vol. 2*, 123. Most scholars understand this phrase as referring to a general resurrection of the dead at the end of time or when Christ returns to usher in the messianic age. However, this phrase is never used of general resurrection, but rather the words “resurrection from the dead” are used (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:12–13, 21, 42).

⁴⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 701 comments: “The word ‘holy’ (*hagios*) is taken from OT sacrificial language. The word will not, then, have the technical sense of ‘set apart by God for salvation’ that it usually has in Paul but will connote a being ‘set apart’ by God for special attention in a more general way. Paul is not here asserting the salvation of every Israelite but the continuing ‘special’ identity of the people of Israel in the eyes of the Lord.”

⁴¹ Eaton, *Romans*, 211.

⁴² Gk. *aparche* = “firstfruits,” a term for the first part of something that has been set aside and offered to God before the remainder can be used, see Num 15:19–21.

⁴³ Gen 12:1–2; 17:7–8; cf. Ps 52:8; 128:3; Jer 11:16; Hosea 14:6; see also Eph 2:11–16; 3:5–6.

⁴⁴ This is a present imperative with negative particle which usually means to stop an act already in process. Rom 11:13, 18, 20, 25, imply that there was a problem in the church of Rome between believing Jews and Gentiles.

⁴⁵ The word *ego* (“I”) is emphatic.

⁴⁶ Ash, *Teaching Romans, Vol. 2*, 125.

⁴⁷ John 4:24; cf. Rom 1:16.

⁴⁸ Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Kindness and Severity of God” (Rom 11:13–24): www.bible.org/seriespage/kindness-and-severity-god-romans-1113-24; accessed 12 June 2011.

⁴⁹ The phrase “cut off” is often used of capital punishment or severance from the covenant community but never of eternal hell (see Gen 17:14; Lev 20:2, 4–5; 7:20; 17:4; Num 19:13, 20). Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville: Schoettle, 1992), 460.

⁵⁰ Eaton, *Romans*, 215: “But please note that God’s ‘kindness’ is mentioned before His ‘severity.’ Kindness is on offer; severity is the alternative.”

⁵¹ In *The Message* Eugene Peterson paraphrases Rom 11:22 in this way: “Be sure you stay alert to these qualities of gentle kindness and ruthless severity that exist side by side in God. Ruthless with the dead wood, but gentle with the grafted shoot. But, don’t presume on God. The moment you become dead wood, you are out of here!”

⁵² Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

⁵³ Harrison and Hagner, “Romans,” 175.

⁵⁴ Cf. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13.

⁵⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 719 remarks, “The first clause of v. 26 is the storm center in the interpretation of Rom. 9–11 and of NT teaching about the Jews and their future.” Moo (722–23) comments: “‘All Israel,’ as the OT and Jewish sources demonstrate, has a corporate significance, referring to the nation as a whole and not to every single individual who is a part of that nation. The phrase is similar, then, to those that we sometimes use to denote a large and representative number from a group; that is, ‘the whole school turned out to see the football game’; ‘the whole nation was outraged at the incident.’”

⁵⁶ A quotation from Isa 59:20–21.

⁵⁷ A quotation from Isa 27:9; Jer 31:33–34.

⁵⁸ Gk. *musterion*, see 1 Cor 2:1; 15:51; Eph 1:9; 3:3; 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:26; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9, 16.

⁵⁹ Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” explains the “mystery” in Rom 11:25: (1) It is a “sacred secret”—known only to God. (2) God must make it known by revelation. (3) The revelation involves giving brand new truth or clarifying unclear truth in the OT. (4) It most often concerns future things. The mystery is that Israel’s restoration (“life from the dead”) will follow a great response of faith among Gentiles (the church).

⁶⁰ Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

⁶¹ Gk. *pleroma*, see Rom 11:12; 13:10; 1 Cor 10:26; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:23; 3:19; Col 1:19; 2:9.

⁶² Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” makes several helpful observations about how “all Israel” is used in the OT: (1) It is never used of the Jews through the generations, but of a group at a specific time. (2) It is used of a unified nation with all the tribes together. (3) It is used of a large group that represents the whole nation (e.g., an army). (4) It is used of the return of a remnant that was captured and led to a foreign nation.

⁶³ Bruce writes, “‘All Israel’ is a recurring expression in Jewish literature, where it need not mean ‘every Jew without a single exception,’ but ‘Israel as a whole’” F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 209.

⁶⁴ The adjective *ametameletos* (“irrevocable”) is only used one other time in the NT (2 Cor 7:10).

⁶⁵ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Romans” (2010 ed.): www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/romans.pdf, 131.

⁶⁶ Eaton, *Romans*, 221: The entire argument of Rom 11:1–32 is boiled down in the sweeping principle of 11:32.

⁶⁷ Eaton, *Romans*, 220.

⁶⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 737 rightly observes, “A critical frame of reference in Paul’s treatment of Israel’s salvation is a distinction between corporate and individual election.”

⁶⁹ Knowledge is what He knows; wisdom is how He applies it. God not only knows what he knows, but He knows what to do with what He knows.

⁷⁰ The adjective *anexeraunetos* only occurs here in the NT. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 742 explains that the term refers to God’s “‘executive’ decisions about the direction of salvation history.”

⁷¹ A quotation from Isa 40:13.

⁷² A quotation from Job 41:11.

⁷³ Osborne, *Romans*, 313 and others observe that the nine-line hymn is constructed in a series of threes: three exclamations (11:33; the first names three divine attributes), three questions (11:34–35) and a threefold prepositional formula (11:36). Constable, “Notes on Romans” 132 comments: “This doxology corresponds to the one at the end of chapter 8 where Paul concluded his exposition of God’s plan for bringing His righteousness to humankind (8:31–39). There the emphasis was on the people of God. Here it is on the plan of God.”

⁷⁴ Hughes says it well: “Our study of God and his ways among us should turn our hearts to music. The term *theology* produces in the mind of the man on the street visions of damp libraries and musty tomes and somber monasteries. Instead, *theology* should suggest light and dancing! And that is what our present passage should do for us.” R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), Electronic ed.

⁷⁵ See Eph 1:9–12; 1 Tim 1:17.

⁷⁶ Ray Pritchard, “The Oldest Dad in the Nursery” (Rom 4:18–25): www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-05-24-The-Oldest-Dad-in-the-Nursery/; accessed 6 June 2011.