

THE SPIRITUAL STATUS OF ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES | ROMANS 11:16-24

- Verse 16 - Using two illustrations (the **firstfruits** and the **root**), Paul gives example of the holy purpose of the entire nation. Despite the current condition (v. 8), the holy purpose remains.
- Verse 17 –
 - It is important to understand what this verse says and what it does not say.
 - **some of the branches** is a reference to the portion of Israel that is in the temporary blindness (v. 8).
 - **be broken off** is a reference to the temporary blindness. Note that it cannot be a reference to a permanent loss of the Abrahamic blessings, because they can be grafted in again (v. 23).
 - **wild olive tree** is a reference to the gentiles (v. 13). Once grafted in, these branches will **partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree**.
 - The big question: what exactly is **the olive tree**?
 - Is it the Abrahamic covenant? Since this is a covenant of land, there is no indication that the gentiles can claim the land of Israel.
 - Is it the Mosaic covenant? This is the *old covenant*, under which even the Jewish nation is currently not obligated. Living under the Law will not bring you into the Abrahamic covenant nor the promised blessings of the Law (Heb. 8).
 - Is it the Davidic covenant? This covenant is the promise of a Messiah who will destroy the empires of the world, and has not yet been fulfilled.
 - Is it the New Covenant? The description of the New Covenant shows that it is yet future in its fulfillment.
 - Is it salvation by grace through faith? It cannot be, because verse 21 would imply a loss of salvation.
 - Is it Israel as the elect? It cannot be, because election is permanent and branches cannot be cut off, and because election is before the foundation of the world, thus branches cannot be later grafted in.
 - The tree/root, then, must be equated to the plan and purpose of God in the world. Where they were once **aliens from the commonwealth of Israel...having no hope**, now God **hath broken down the middle wall of partition** and Gentiles are part of God's plan and purpose for this age. Therefore, Paul magnifies his office (v. 13).
 - Any other definition of the tree, outside of the plan and purpose of God, hits theological issues when carried to its end.
 - Note: many interpreters see the tree as the "collective people of God." This causes theological error in that there becomes no distinction between Israel and the church.
- Verse 18 –
 - An attitude of arrogance against blinded Israel or smug self-righteousness in comparison with Israel is unbiblical. The only reason the gentile church exists is the gracious plan and purpose of God, which will not supplant the plan and purpose as taught in the Hebrew Scriptures, but is only temporary or parenthetical.
 - Note: from v. 18-22 Paul uses the second person singular rather than the plural. It is assumed that he writes to a non-existent but individual gentile who is symbolically representative of the Gentiles as a whole. This use of the imaginary representative is almost essential since God is not dealing with nations in the age of Grace.
- Verse 19 –
 - This is Paul's example of the boasting that could take place among the gentiles. It is an attitude that puts "me" at the center of God's plan.
 - How is this boasting done in the modern church?
 - By hate-filled comments about Jewish unbelief (while the same are overflowing with love toward the neighboring Muslims in their unbelief).
 - By replacement theology of all stripes (the church replaces Israel / Jesus replaces Israel / amillennialism, postmillennialism, etc.)
- Verse 20 - In Greek there is an easily seen contrast. The Israelites were **broken off** because of ἀπιστία [apistia] and the saved gentiles **stand by faith** πίστει [pistei].
- Verse 21 - The **natural branches** were the Jewish generation that should have believed, and thus participated in God's plan for Israel. Because they failed to believe, God **spared not** this generation nor their offspring, but placed them into a

temporary blindness. The purpose and plan of God today is to individuals (neither Jew nor Gentile), and this generation should **be not highminded, but fear** (v. 20) lest God bring the times of the gentiles to a close.

- Verse 22 –
 - This verse introduces an intriguing thought: Could it be that God extends the age of grace as long as the nations **continue in his goodness**, but when they cease to do so, **thou also shalt be cut off?** (See note on v. 25 concerning the **fullness of the Gentiles**).
 - Note again that a "fall from grace" scenario can be made from this verse if not properly interpreted.
- Verse 23 - The day will certainly come when Israel is no longer in **unbelief**, and in that day will be restored, collectively, to the covenant relationship with God.
- Verse 24 - Paul goes back to his illustration to show the ease at which God could graft the nation back into His plan and purpose.

THE MYSTERY | ROMANS 11:25-27

- Verse 25 –
 - The **mystery** of which Paul speaks is the grafting in of the gentiles to the purpose and plan of God prior to the glorification of Israel in the Kingdom.
 - Note that one should not confuse the prophesied salvation of gentiles in the Old Testament with what is happening today, because each of those prophesies used the instrumentality of glorified Israel, under her Messiah, to bring the nations to God.
 - It seems that ignorance of this mystery is a preeminent feature in the church today.
 - Being **wise in your own conceits** is the result of ignorance of the mystery. Only knowing that the Jewish nation has been cut off and the gentiles are being saved, without knowing the mystery behind it, one comes to incorrect theological conclusions which give an anti-Jewish arrogance to the gentiles.
 - **Blindness in part** - This is not a blindness that completely encompasses every Jew, but a **blindness in part**, the word **part** being "a portion."
 - **until the fullness** –
 - While this phrase is often taken to be "the full count of gentiles," the text does not say as much. However, we can find textual evidence to show that the "time of the gentiles" does have a limit, and will come to a fullness. When this time has expired, then God will remove the hardening of Israel. See Lk 21:24.
 - Note that HCSB has **until the full number of the Gentiles has come in**. Similar is found in the NIV, TEV, and NLT. This is eisegesis and not reputable translation.
- Verse 26 –
 - **And so all Israel will be saved** -
 - This is seen in the fulfillment of the New Covenant, when no Jew will teach his neighbor the things of God, because they will all know it.
 - An interpretive question with ""καὶ οὕτως," is this *modal* or *temporal*? ESV takes a more *modal* approach, while KJV and NASB takes a temporal approach. The *modal* approach allows for a replacement theology to fit within the text, while a *temporal* interpretation only allows for a literal interpretation of "all Israel." Under the ESV rendering, the "fullness of the gentiles" can be "the way in which all Israel is saved."
 - For evidence of a temporal interpretation, note "until" (*archi*) in v. 25. Strong's says this word is, "through the idea of a terminus." Furthermore the temporal use of *outos* is used in v. 31.
 - In the larger context, Paul is explaining why Israel is now out of fellowship with God, and yet how God will remain true to His word and covenant to save Israel.
 - The ESV says, "And in this way all Israel will be saved." This is a modal rather than temporal translation, and allows for replacement theology. Other translations which follow this pattern are NIV, HCSB, CSB, TEV, and *The Message*.
 - **there shall come...a deliverer** - In context of the quote (Isaiah 59:20-21), we are told both when and how Israel will be saved. In v. 16 we are told it will be *when* there is no one to intercede (thus after the rapture), and *by* the might of the Lord Himself.