

11:1-6: *I say then, Did God cast off his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God did not cast off his people which he foreknew. Or know ye not what the scripture saith of Elijah? how he pleadeth with God against Israel: 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. 5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.*

The arguments in chapters 9 and 10 must be kept in mind as the question in 11:1 is read. God did not “cast off” (away) His people. Rather, as Paul showed again and again, it was the people who rebelled against God (see 9:20a; 10:16, 21). This question was formed with a special grammatical construction that anticipates a negative response. It is like a rhetorical question and might be worded in this way: “God did not reject His people, did He?” As in other parts of this letter Paul responded with “*God forbid*” (for other instances of this expression in Romans see 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:11).

In 1b Paul used himself as proof that God did not reject the Jewish people. Paul was an “*Israelite*,” a member of the “*tribe of Benjamin*,” and a child of “*Abraham*.” Paul was saved, so his personal spiritual condition was fine. If God had cut off the Jewish people, Paul would not have had salvation. The fact that Paul was saved proved that God did not cut off the Jewish people. It should again be noted that Paul’s salvation was not related to his bloodline. A true Jew is based upon the *inward* man (2:28-29). Being part of *spiritual Israel* is what counts (Gal. 6:16).

The information in verse 2 repeats the point. God “*foreknew*” the people of Israel, and He did not reject them. This fact is also affirmed in the Old Testament in places like 1 Sam. 12:22. The people that God *foreknew* are those who “walk by faith.” This has been true for every dispensation of time (compare Rom. 1:17). For information on the word *foreknow* (*proginosko*), see the commentary on Rom. 8:29 where this same term is used.

At the end of verse 2 Paul introduced “*Elijah*.” This prophet was upset with Israel (see the conversation he had with God, 1 Kgs. 19:10-14). When Elijah spoke of altars being torn down and prophets being killed, he described the time when Jezebel threatened him. Elijah wanted God to notice Israel’s sins against heaven and heaven’s messengers. Both the ASV and KJV say this prophet petitioned God (present tense) “*against*” Israel. God’s prophet was *not* trying to help them! Several prayers were issued against the nation of Israel! Paul’s word for “*pleadeth*” (*entunchano*) is rendered “*intercession*” in the KJV. This same term is also found in Rom. 8:27, 34, and Heb. 7:25—passages which all express the idea of intercession. For additional information on the subject of intercession and prayer, see the commentary on Acts 8:23-24.

Contrary to what Elijah thought, God was paying attention to things and He did respond to the prophet’s concerns (Rom. 11:4). God also showed Elijah that things were not as bad as he thought. Apostasy in the land was rampant but there were still people who were faithful to God. Paul said that 7,000 men were still faithful to God. This Old Testament illustration makes a point that is still true. Many religious institutions are corrupt and many religious people are not pleasing to God but all is not lost. There are still “*7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.” *Bowed* (*kampto*) occurs only four times in the New Testament. The other three places are Rom. 14:11 (every knee will one day bow before deity); Eph. 3:14 (Paul bowed his knees in prayer); and Phil. 2:10 (all will one day bow before Jesus).

Baal was an ancient Canaanite god. “Considered the son or grandson of El, Baal controlled rain, wind, and clouds and was considered responsible for fertility. Therein lay the basis for the sexual orgies that constituted part of the worship of this deity. Artisans typically represented Baal as a man with a thunderbolt in his left hand, a club in the other, and a helmet with the horns of a bull. The local manifestations of Baal appeared in names like Baal-gad, Baal-hamon, Baal-hermon, Baal-Peor. As a group the idols of this god were the *Baalim*, the Hebrew masculine plural form of *Baal*” (CBL, GED, 1:518). In the Old Testament this god first appears in Num. 22:41.

According to the 5th verse there is still a *remnant* “*according to the election of grace*.” If any Jew

wanted to argue that God had cut off His people, Paul was prepared to say that this was not true. Some of the Hebrew people were saved. Saying that God had cut off His people was as erroneous as Elijah's assertion that he was the only person who was faithful to God.

The people who please God are described by the word *remnant*. This word meant "a few of the many (Jer. 42:2). The doctrine of the remnant can be found in both Testaments. Noah and his family survived the flood, Lot and his daughters were spared at Sodom, some of the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity and a few accept Christ today (Matt 7:13-14)" (Allen, p. 95).

The latter part of the 5th verse relates to many of the things already studied. In 9:15 it was observed that only God establishes the conditions for grace and salvation. The material in 3:24 affirmed that free justification and grace are only in Christ. It is also possible to *stand* in God's grace (5:1-2). Thus, any Jew who desires salvation must come to and use God's grace just like the Gentiles. The Jews must accept God's conditions, accept justification in Christ, and they must "stand in God's grace." Anyone who is part of the *remnant* complies with these conditions. Information about *election* (*ekloge*) was offered in the commentary on Rom. 9:11. God has taken the initiative in various ways (compare 1 Thess. 1:4 and 2 Pet. 1:10 where this same term is used), and He pursues a plan based upon His foreknowledge. As God proceeds, He does not interfere with man's free-will. Here the *election* is related to God's "grace."

The 6th verse reiterates the point about salvation and grace. If we are saved by grace, and we are, salvation does not come from "works." Salvation is by either grace or works; it cannot be by both. If *works* save us, grace is excluded (6b).

11:7-10: *What then? that which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not; but the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened: 8 according as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this very day. 9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, And a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: 10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, And bow thou down their back always.*

Previous material helps us understand these four verses. Israel was *searching* for something. What did this nation seek? The Hebrew people wanted *righteousness* (Rom. 9:31). Paul showed in 9:31 that Israel did not attain this righteousness. The reason? Paul stated the reason in Rom. 9:32; Israel sought righteousness *through the law* and *by works*. These actions did not result in righteousness, because salvation and justification come from grace instead of law keeping and works (11:5-6). "The Greeks of Paul's day were consumed with a passion for knowledge. The Romans lusted for power, but the Jews searched for righteousness. They did not find the righteousness they desired because they rejected the only One who could make them righteous" (CBL, Romans, p. 175).

The "*election*" attained salvation because they went about it in the right way. The Jews did not use the right approach and as a result were "*hardened*" (the KJV has "*blinded*"). "The word 'blinded' bears the meaning of 'hardened' or 'calloused.' The verb is *poroo* and the noun is *porosis*, a medical word meaning a callous. Callouses become hardened and more or less insensitive to feeling. As a callous forms on the hand, a spiritual callous can grow on the heart" (CBL, Romans, p. 175). Aside from here, this term occurs only in Mk. 6:52; 8:17; Jn. 12:40; 2 Cor. 3:14. When used here and in 2 Cor. 3:14, the *hardness* is so overwhelming the proper sense of the thought is *blinded*.

The Jews rejected salvation by grace because God's word did not give them the choices they wanted. Therefore, they became *vessels of dishonor* (9:21) and were like *Pharaoh* (9:17). These verses may be compared with the following passages and comments:

- **Acts 13:46** – People may behave in such a way that they are unworthy of eternal life.
- **2 Thess. 2:10-12** – If people want to reject God's word and embrace error, God will allow that. God will not force people to do His will.

Verse 8 is a quotation from Isa. 29:10, and a key word is “*stupor*” (*katanuxis*), a term found only here in the New Testament. Many of the Hebrews were in such a state of spiritual apostasy that they didn’t want to recognize their condition. As noted in the above references, hearts were hardened (verse 7), God allowed this (2 Thess. 2:10-12), and the result was *stupor* (spiritual insensitivity). Thayer (p. 334) says this term means “so insensible that they are not affected at all by the offer made them of salvation through the Messiah.” Certainly the end of verse 8 shows the Jewish hardness. When Paul spoke of the people’s “*hearts not hearing*” and “*eyes not seeing*,” he used the present tense. He concluded the verse with “*unto this very day*.” Christianity really was a *stumbling block* to many Jews (1 Cor. 1:23).

The 9th verse is a quotation from Ps. 69:22. David pleaded for God to bring misfortunate and defeat to his enemies. In studying this psalm, special attention should be paid to verses 21 and 26. David apparently had some idea about one of his future descendants (Jesus). Excellent cross-references are Ps. 110:1 and Mt. 22:43-45.

Though David may have lacked some specific knowledge about the Lord, he did predict that Jesus would be treated very badly. This realization prompted him to ask that the Lord’s abusers be punished for their cruelty. David also asked that punishment be imposed upon those who would reject the Lord. In fact, the first century Jews who would not repent and accept Christ were put on the same level as David’s enemies—a fact which would have shocked and greatly angered all Jews who still clung to Moses’ law.

Among the requested punishments were “*darkened eyes*” (the eyes are one of the most essential members of the body) and *constantly* (“*always*”) “*bowed backs*.” The *bowed backs* refer to a heavy burden because rejecting Jesus is very serious (compare Acts 13:10-11). *Bow down* comes from a single term (*sunkampto*) that occurs only here in the New Testament. While rare, it is a powerful picture of Israel’s oppression and trouble because of disbelief. Paul’s word for *always* (*diapantos*) appears seven times in the New Testament. “It describes a period of time throughout or during which anything is done. It emphasizes the whole period of time to its very end” (CBL, GED, 2:94). For the other places this term occurs, see Mk. 5:5; Lk. 24:53; Acts 10:2; Acts 24:16; Heb. 9:6; 13:15. The word *darkened* (*skotizomai*) here means “the mental and spiritual capacity of perverse people to understand divine truth” (CBL, GED, 6:74-75). “This obtuseness is caused by a deliberate rejection of the truth in favor of an earthly system characterized by immorality and deception. The result is that the ability to discern between truth and error, or good and evil, is lost. People in that condition are not merely in darkness; they are darkness” (ibid). This term is also found in 1:21 and Eph. 4:18. “*Snare*” (*pagis*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (Lk. 21:35, KJV; 1 Tim. 3:7; 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:26). It described a “trap or snare in terms that make the results grim and lethal because of the unexpected aspect of the situation” (CBL, GED, 5:20).

11:11-12: *I say then, Did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall salvation (is come) unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. 12 Now if their fall, is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?*

The question in verse 11 is very similar to the question asked in verse 1. Paul asked a question and then offered a quick answer to push the matter aside. God had no intention of “casting off His people” (11:1), and He certainly did not want Israel to “*fall*” (verse 11)—another way of saying “being lost/damned.” God wanted His people to “*stand*.” Paul proved this by appealing to the Gentiles. Paul has already stated that the Gentiles were used to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy (10:19). Thus, the salvation offered to the Gentiles was ultimately designed to benefit the Jews. While God did not want His people to be condemned, He could not force them to accept the Lord. Neither could He excuse Israel’s disobedience. If Israel wanted to be disobedient, and it did, the people fell out of God’s favor until they were willing to repent.

Lard’s comments on verse 11 (p. 354) are quite good: “The meaning is, Did Israel stumble at Christ that they might fall? The answer is: ‘Not at all.’ But what is the precise point denied? Not

certainly Israel's stumbling; for this, the question concedes. It must then be the fall; and yet unqualifiedly a fall can not be denied, for the next clause concedes one. In what sense then is a fall denied? A final fall, or fall without remedy is denied. Israel have stumbled and fallen; but their fall is not without hope. A remedy still remains in the gospel; and this remedy is as open to them as to the Gentiles. The extent and duration, therefore, of their fall, will depend wholly on how long they continue to reject the gospel. They will remain fallen so long as they remain disobedient to Christ—no longer.”

Most of the Jewish people did not want to turn to God, and this lack of interest caused them to “fall” (12a) and be “cast away” (15a). Because of this *fall*, God blessed the Gentiles (“riches” refers to the spiritual wealth in Christ). *Riches* (*ploutos*) is used elsewhere in places like Eph. 1:7 (God’s grace) and Eph. 3:8 (spiritual riches are *unsearchable*). God used the image of wealth to describe our immeasurable blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Jews had access to the greatest treasure ever known to man, but when many rejected it, Christians like Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

It must be noted that the fall of the Jews and the blessing of the Gentiles were not *chance* events. God fully intended to bless Gentiles when He made a promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). It would have been better if the Jews had accepted the gospel and been a “light to all the nations” (the Gentiles, Isa. 49:6), but they made a different choice. When the Jews failed to do what they should, God kept His promise and blessed all people through His Son. A summary of these two verses (especially verse 11) can be made with four points: (1) Jews rejected the gospel and this repudiation was sinful. (2) Because the Jews rejected the truth, the gospel was taken to the Gentiles. (3) Jews saw how the gospel went to the Gentiles and this “provoked” them to “jealousy.” (4) Because many Jews were *provoked with jealousy*, they finally sought salvation through Christ. In verse 14 Paul states the fourth point very clearly. He also uses a grammatical construction (constative use of the aorist tense, CBL, GED, 5:55), indicating “the purpose of his ministry—from start to finish—was this redemptive provocation” (*ibid*). At the end of verse 15 Jews who finally accepted the gospel are pictured as a resurrection (*life from the dead*). God used the old principle of “I want to have what you have” to reach many Hebrews and it worked quite well.

11:13-15: *But I speak to you that are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy (them that are) my flesh, and may save some of them. 15 For if the casting away of them (is) the reconciling of the world, what (shall) the receiving (of them be), but life from the dead?*

Previous comments on the text have shown that the Christians at Rome were from a mixed background. Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together. In chapters 9-11 of this book, Paul presented information that related to those from a Jewish background. He proved that the Jews rejected the gospel, described the consequences of this rejection, and expressed his concern for the Jewish people. Here he turned to the other class of readers (the Gentiles) and said they were not overlooked. Paul was very aware of the Gentiles because he was an “*apostle to the Gentiles*.” This was his “*ministry*” (*diakonia*). Ancient Greeks viewed service as something almost unbearable because that implied submission to the will of another. If a person were truly free, Greeks reasoned he would serve himself (i.e. his own wishes and desires). Paul had been placed into the ministry by the Lord (1 Tim. 1:12—a place where this same term is used), and he believed that all people needed to *fulfill* their ministry/service (see 2 Tim. 4:5 where this same term again occurs).

Part of the reason Paul was selected as an apostle to the Gentiles was to “*provoke*” the Jews to “*jealousy*” (see verses 13b-14 as well as the commentary on verses 11-12). Paul was the perfect person to teach hardhearted Jews because he had previously been one of them (Phil. 3:4-6). As a Christian Paul did not believe any religious conviction was fine. Believing in the true God was also not enough. He did his best to bring people out of a religious system that God no longer sanctioned and into the way of truth and New Testament Christianity. We have a similar job: tell people about the “one faith” (Eph. 4:5) and bring them into this way.

The thought in verse 15 is not complicated, but it may need a little clarification. In the first part of

the verse Paul said Israel was “*cast away*” (*apobletos*), a word found only here and Acts 27:22 (“*loss*”) in the New Testament. All Hebrews who rejected Christ and the gospel lost favor with God; they were rejected, damned and condemned unless they repented. While this was very sad, Paul affirmed the Jewish rejection of Jesus also brought something good into the world—*reconciliation* (salvation). The Jews rejected the gospel and God used this negative response to bless the world. “*Reconciling*” (*katallage*) occurs only four times in the New Testament (twice in this book and twice in the Second Corinthian letter). The references are Rom. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19. It is a rare word (though other forms of this word occur in the New Testament), and it has the sense of “the restoration of the original understanding between people after hostility or displeasure” (Brown, 3:166).

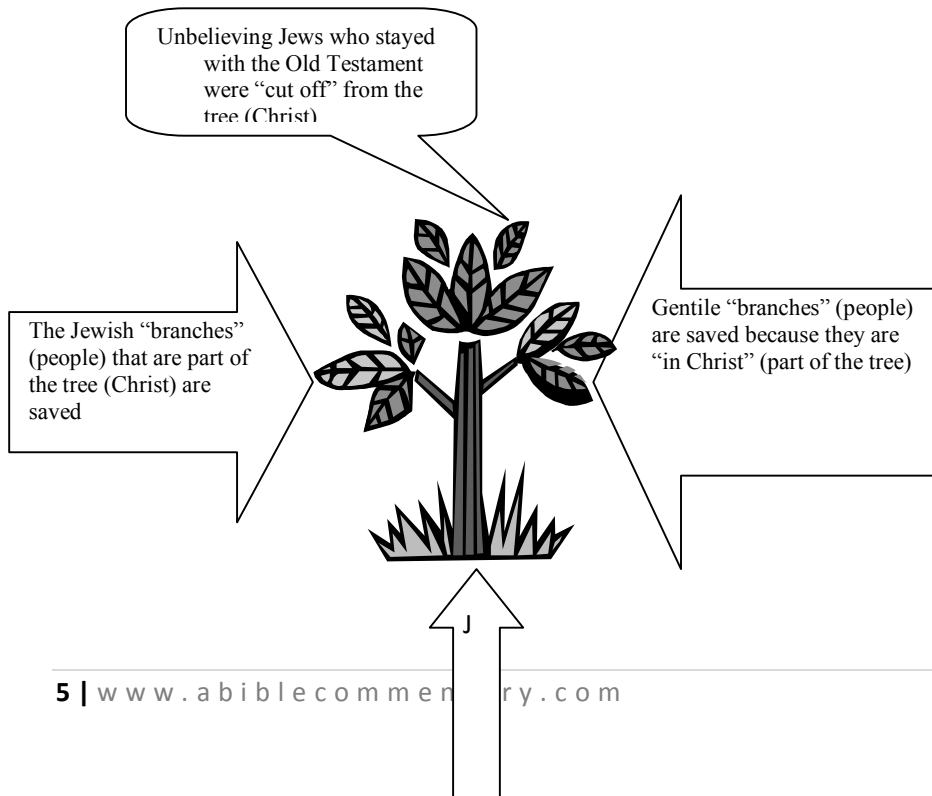
The information in 15b pictures a hypothetical situation, and it is the opposite of *casting away*. Here the emphasis is on “*receiving*” (*proslepsis*). Suppose the Jews had not rejected the gospel. What if the Hebrew people had *received* the truth? If this had occurred there would have been “*life from the dead*.” That is, the Hebrew people would have been in a right relationship with God because they would have obeyed the gospel (Heb. 5:8-9). Those who are guilty of sin and reject the gospel must die (Eph. 2:5-8). Those who accept and obey the gospel receive a new life and salvation (Rom. 6:4).

11:16: *And if the firstfruit is holy, so is the lump: and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

Here Paul argued from the lesser to the greater by using the “*first fruit*.” The *first fruit* (*aparche*) points readers back to Ex. 23:19; Num. 15:19-21; and Deut. 18:4. A modern illustration of Paul’s point can be taken from milk. If we have a gallon of milk that has gone sour, how much of the milk in the container is bad? If a table is filled with food and we fill our plate with a single serving, will our prayer of thanksgiving be for the entire table of food or for the single helping we have taken? The answers are obvious. If part of something is good, the entirety of something is good.

If the *firstfruit* (part of the crop) was “*holy*,” the whole harvest was holy. Paul used the *first fruit* to show that *holiness* cannot be limited to a part of something. In the case of the dough (Num. 15:19-21), the small amount offered to God made the entire amount sacred.

This principle had application in the spiritual realm. If a “*root*” of a tree were *holy*, the “*branches*” on this tree had to be holy. Because Christ is the *root*, all who are “*in Him*” are holy and saved. The expression *in Him* is equivalent to the word *branches*. The following picture visually illustrates this point.



The point made by Paul is explained in many different ways by commentators. Some think the *firstfruit* represents the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. This explanation says that since these men were *holy* the Jewish race was holy. This is a common interpretation in the religious world and it may account for why our government still treats the nation of Israel in a special way.

An interpretation more consistent with the context is the *firstfruit* referring to Christian converts who had a *Jewish* background. If this explanation is correct, Paul's point was this: "Since God has accepted the first Jewish converts, He will accept the whole Jewish nation." The entire Jewish nation could be saved, if they would enter into Christ and be a *branch* in the Lord (Jn. 15:1-6). All people from the Hebrew race must obey the gospel and be in the Lord (2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 5:8-9) if they want salvation.

11:17-21: *But if some of the branches were broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wast grafted in among them, and didst become partaker with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree; 18 glory not over the branches: but if thou gloriest, it is not thou that bearest the root, but the root thee. 19 Thou wilt say then, Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. 20 Well; by their unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by thy faith. Be not highminded, but fear: 21 for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee.*

There are some difficult sections in Rom. 11, and these five verses are problematic. Does the word "*branches*" mean the same thing in verses 16-17? Did Paul mean to say that some Jews became Christians (they were the "first fruit") and then God *broke them off*? This is a difficult conclusion to accept and sustain.

If the explanation given for *first fruit* in verse 16 (Jewish converts) is right, then Paul applied a *different meaning* to the word *branches* in verse 17. The branches that were *broken off* in verse 17 were Jews who lived under the Old Testament system and did not embrace the New Testament (compare Mt. 8:11-12). Of the ten times the word *branches* (*klados*) is used in the New Testament, five of the occurrences are in Rom. 11:16-21.

In 17b the thought is continued and Paul introduced the Gentiles. Those who were not Jewish were like a "*wild olive tree*." In making this comparison, Paul used a metaphor instead of a simile (the comparative word was omitted). The "*grafting*" described by Paul was 100% complete. The Gentiles became part of the tree's "*root*" and "*fatness*." These words should be compared to the picture on page 235. *Grafted in* (*enkestrizo*) occurs only a few times in the New Testament, and all these places are in Rom. 11 (verses 17, 19, 23, 24). Thayer (p. 166) offers this definition of the term: "Paul likens the heathen who by becoming Christians have been admitted into fellowship with the people for whom the Messianic salvation is destined, to scions from wild trees inserted into a cultivated stock."

The significance of olive trees is found in the Old Testament. Under the Old Covenant God's people were sometimes compared to an olive tree (see Jer. 11:16 and Hosea 14:6) as these were one of the most valued and useful trees in all Palestine. More information about the olive tree and how it

relates to the gospel is available in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (3:2184) as well as the following points.

- Several years are required before these trees reach their full fruitfulness.
- Hostile armies could invade the land and destroy trees and other items in a matter of days. If these trees grew to maturity, it meant the people were at peace and war was a distant memory. The existence of these trees represented peace.
- Scripture portrays this tree as being beautiful (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6; Ps. 128:3).
- In Rom. 11 Paul pictured more than an olive tree. He described the “*grafting in*” of a wild olive tree. This is very important. As a general rule *wild olive trees* are *little more than a shrub*. They have small leaves, a prickly stem, and produce little to no oil. Grafting a good olive tree with a wild olive tree is senseless. Yet, this was what God did. He took the Gentiles, a people who were despised and scorned, and grafted them into a beautiful tree. He did what men would normally never do.
- Take a moment to study Eph. 5:26-27 to see what this new *tree* is like.
- The *Gentiles* were *grafted in* to this tree because of their *belief* (verse 20).
- The *Jews*, who Paul compared to *branches*, were *cut off* because of their *unbelief*.
- If the Gentiles failed to continue with their “belief,” they too would be removed. On the other hand, if Jews began to *believe* (accept and obey the gospel), they could be grafted into this tree (the *tree* is identical to the *one body*, Eph. 4:4-5. Paul called this one body the *church* in Eph. 1:22-23).

Since Paul showed that the Gentiles were made part of God’s *tree* (and this is another picture of the church), he quickly added a warning. This warning was given to the Gentiles (verse 18), and it is very strong. Paul used a special grammatical construction which means “stop glorying” or “do not have the habit of glorying over the branches” (Robertson, 4:396). Also, the word for *glory* (“*boast*,” KJV) is quite strong. This term (*katakauchaomai*) is a present tense verb. It meant “to brag about oneself in comparison with others” (CBL, GED, 3:259). According to Gingrich and Danker (p. 411), it was found on a grave inscription in Asia Minor (the monument inscription refers to a gladiator who gloated over a defeated foe).

The Gentiles were apparently treating Jews with strong contempt. They might have said to their Jewish brethren, “You were God’s special people but your status has been lost. All Gentiles are now entitled to be in the family of God and your nation has been rejected.” Because the Jews had been so unkind to the Gentiles in the past Paul realized non-Jews (Gentiles) could be tempted to act just as he described (with spite and bitter remarks). To resolve the hostility Paul said, “*it is not thou that bearest the root.*” That is, “You Gentiles did not originate the process of salvation that I have described. You are not responsible for blessing all mankind and therefore have no reason to brag or gloat.”

The basis for all that exists in Christianity was the *root* (the Hebrew religion). Judaism had to exist to bring salvation to the Gentiles (see Jn. 4:22; Isa. 2:2f; Rom. 11:26). Without the Jews and their history, salvation would have never come to the world. Thus, before the Gentiles mocked and derided the Jews, they needed to remember that their access to Christ was based upon work done by the Jewish people.

What Paul wrote should be a good lesson for us. Before speaking badly about Christians from the past, we must remember that without others we might have very little or nothing at all. A church

building might not exist and a congregation of God's people might not exist if it had not been for our predecessors. This part of Romans tells us to remember and appreciate people from the past.

Paul described the Jewish people as "*natural branches*." That is, God started out with the Hebrew people. He selected one family and made a covenant with them (Rom. 9:4-5; Eph. 2:12). This was how the process began.

The expressions "*sons of the covenant*" (Acts 3:25) and "*sons of the kingdom*" show that the people used by God had a prominent and important place in history. While the Gentiles were not second-class citizens in the kingdom, the Jewish race deserves to be recognized for its contributions to the New Testament and salvation. The Jews were the means God used to bring salvation to the world and the Bible recognizes their part in the process.

In verse 19 there is a warning. Paul also knew his Gentile readers might conclude that the *branches* (Jews who were not Christians and loyal to the Old Testament) were "*cut off*" to make room for the Gentiles.

While it is true that many Jews were cut off (verse 17), their removal was *not* to "make room" for the *grafting in* of the Gentiles. The Jews were cut off because they rejected the gospel. Paul wanted his readers to know that any unsaved Hebrew who wanted to obey the gospel could; there was room enough for all the Hebrews. The same was true for the Gentiles. The *tree* (Christ's body) is large enough for everyone (Jn. 3:16). Having all people together in one *tree* (which is also known as the Lord's *body* and *church*) is God's will (Eph. 2:14).

The 20th verse contains a summary. The nation of Israel, as a whole, refused to "*believe*" (this word is a synecdoche that means obedience to the gospel). Because the Jews refused to follow the New Testament, they were "*broken off*." For another demonstration of how the Bible uses *synecdoches*, see 2 Thess. 3:8 ("*bread*" includes food, drink, shelter, etc.).

While Jewish unbelief removed many Hebrews from God's fellowship, heaven allowed the Gentiles to "*stand*" (be part of the tree). The Gentiles became part of the *tree* "by faith." This was not mere belief but obedience to the gospel (see the comments on 1:5).

Though the Gentiles had the right to be *in Christ* and have all spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3), Paul warned them about pride and haughtiness. According to 20b the Gentiles were instructed to "*fear*" and "*not be high minded*." It was right to enjoy and use their status in Christ, but boasting about their privileges was wrong. Gentiles were proud about things that were not worthy of bigheadedness, and in describing this mindset Paul used the present tense. Other matters (compare 1 Tim. 6:17) also create pride in the lives of people, but often what matters so much to people is usually of little importance. What should matter most in the minds of people is Christ and faithful Christian living (Mt. 6:33; Gal. 2:20).

If saved people do not want to behave and stay in God's body (*tree*) they will be removed. People will lose their salvation (verse 21) if they do not continue to abide in the Lord (Jn. 15:6). When the Jews refused to follow God's plans, they were cast off. Paul said the same would be true for the Gentiles if they rebelled.

Before looking at the next set of verses, we must understand why God rejected the Jewish people. The Jews were cut off because they rejected the New Testament and did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They were *not* cut off to make room for the Gentiles.

11:22-24: *Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. 23 And they also, if they continue not in their unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if thou wast cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and wast grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more shall these, which are the natural (branches), be grafted into their own olive tree?*

While many only think about God's love and mercy, Paul taught that God's nature also consists of *wrath*. The side of God that dispenses justice and punishment is seen in both testaments. God is a God of grace and a God of wrath.

Both of these qualities will be demonstrated on the Day of Judgment. Even before this day comes, Rom. 11 affirms that men can experience God's goodness and punishment. The *goodness* comes to those who obey (Jn. 14:15; 15:12-14). *Wrath* falls upon those who reject and go against Jesus' will. *Goodness* (*chrestotes*) is used three times in verse 22; it is also applied to God earlier in this book (2:4). This term is contrasted with "*severity*" (*apotomia*), and it shows that "Kindness and severity" are 'the two standards of divine righteousness'" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:475). *Severity* is used only here in the New Testament, and it occurs three times in verse 22. It is a term that denotes strictness; people can either face God's grace and mercy or His full displeasure. Kittle (8:108) wrote, "Those who do not cleave to God's goodness are threatened by 'the inflexible hardness and severity' of the Judge as the only alternative. The severity of the divine judgment is thus described here by an expression which was used already in Greek for the pitiless severity of the law."

To receive God's *goodness* (kindness) we must "*continue*" in His goodness. This is another way of saying that salvation is conditional (compare Jude 21).

The statement about God's goodness reminds Bible students of Rom. 5:6-8. God loved humanity when it was sinful and opposed to Him. Yet, because God is good, He sent His son to the earth to live with human beings and to pay the price for their sins.

The end of verse 22 contains a clear reference to losing our salvation. "*If*" Christians do not *continue* (*epimeno*) in the way that God has given ("the faith," Jude 3), they will be lost ("*also be cut off*"). Any nation or any individual that refuses to obey God will perish. *Continue* is a verb that is well illustrated by its use in other parts of the New Testament (see Jn. 8:7; Acts 12:16; Rom. 6:1; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16). *Cut off* (*ekkopto*) was also used by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:10—"hewn down") and Jesus (Mt. 5:30).

Verse 23 expands the thought. Many Jews refused to believe (accept Christ and the gospel) but their rejection did not need to be a permanent decision. There was hope (compare 2 Pet. 3:9). Before Christ and the gospel, the Jews had been God's people. This could again be the case if they obeyed the gospel. Paul said God was "*able*" to "*graft them in*" (*enkenrizo*), a word that occurs only here in the New Testament (it is used in verses 17, 19, 23, and 24 of Rom. 11). In verses 17 and 19, this word applies to Gentiles being *grafted in* to the people of God. Here the term is applied to Jews. Staying with the Old Testament put Jews outside salvation so they "*again*" had to be brought to God through the gospel.

Continue (*epimeno*) is the same word used in verse 22, though here it is used negatively. People can initially obey and *continue* in the New Testament system God has given (verse 22), or *continue* in something else (in verse 23 the choice is continued unbelief). Only one choice leads to eternal life. If we are not on the road to eternal life, we may change our destiny at any time prior to death. Waiting, however, is not recommended (2 Cor. 6:2).

Verse 24 is an assurance that all Jews would be welcomed into the New Testament system if they obeyed. This is expressed in the form of a contrast. Since God was willing to take Gentiles (a *wild olive tree*—people who were unsaved—the *wild olive* description suggests God had not bestowed the care upon them that Jews had received) and *graft* them into the "tree" composing the saved, would not God be ready and willing to save the nation He had cared for in the past? *Yes* is the only possible answer. A good description of the grafting process is given in the CBL (Romans, p. 185): "Normally the good branch or graft is grafted into a poor stock. The good shoot receives the needed sap for growth from the inferior tree or stock. The graft retains the characteristics and qualities of its own heritage though it receives the sap of the inferior stock and is thus enabled to produce good fruit." Since God was able to graft the wild olive (Gentiles) into good stock (what we know as the church), He is able to graft the natural branches which were broken off (Jews) into it too.

11:25: *For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in;*

Many who are interested in Israel's future view Rom. 11 as a future prophecy. Before drawing any conclusions, we must examine some key points from the text. What Paul said was directed to the

Gentiles. Paul did not want his non-Jewish readers to be “ignorant” (*agnoeo*). Paul often spoke of *ignorance*, and this is something that he wanted Christians to avoid (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1). Here the thought is “I want you to know” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:21), and this knowledge involved the “mystery.”

The word *mystery* (*mysterion*) is used in different parts of the New Testament and the word has an unusual definition. Though we use this term to describe information that is hard to understand, the Bible uses this term to describe truth *that has not been revealed*. Passages that illustrate the Biblical meaning of the word include Col. 1:26 and Eph. 3:9. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (p. 48) lists these passages and points:

- Matthew 13:11 – “the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven”
- Luke 8:10 – “the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of God”
- Romans 11:25 – “this mystery...Israel has experienced a hardening in part”
- Romans 16:25-26 – “the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed”
- 1 Corinthians 4:1 – “servants of Christ...entrusted with the secret things [mysteries] of God”
- Ephesians 1:9 – “the mystery of His will”
- Ephesians 3:2-3 – “the administration of God’s grace...the mystery made known to me by revelation”
- Ephesians 3:4 – “the mystery of Christ”
- Ephesians 3:9 – “this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God”
- Ephesians 5:32 – “a profound mystery...Christ and the church”
- Colossians 1:26 – “the mystery...kept hidden for ages and generations, but...now disclosed”
- Colossians 1:27 – “this mystery, which is Christ in you”
- Colossians 2:2 – “the mystery of God, namely, Christ”
- Colossians 4:3 – “the mystery of Christ”
- 2 Thessalonians 2:7 – “the secret power [mystery] of lawlessness is already at work”
- 1 Timothy 3:9 – “keep hold of the deep truths [mysteries] of the faith”
- 1 Timothy 3:16 – “the mystery of godliness is great”
- Revelation 1:20 – “the mystery of the seven stars...is this [they] are angels”
- Revelation 10:7 – “the mystery of God will be accomplished”
- Revelation 17:5 – “Mystery, Babylon the Great”

If God “*cut off*” the rebellious and unbelieving Hebrews (verses 21-22), the Gentiles may not have understood why this was done. This act would have been a *mystery* and the Gentiles would have been *ignorant* of God’s true intentions. The Gentiles had to understand the truth so they would not “*be wise in their own conceits*” (filled with pride). It was essential that the Gentiles realize that many of the Jews had been “*hardened*.” For a discussion of how hearts are hardened see 9:14-18.

Wise (*phronimos*) normally has a positive sense in the New Testament. Jesus spoke of a *wise man* building a house upon a rock (Mt. 7:24—same word). Other places this term has a positive sense include Mt. 10:16; 24:45; 25:2. In Rom. 11:25, *wise* has the sense of arrogance. *Hardness* (*porosis*) is translated “*blindness*” in the KJV. In the New Testament this word occurs only three times (Mk. 3:5; here; Eph. 4:18), and Thayer (p. 559) offers several definitions for it: “*the covering with a callus*;

obtuseness of mental discernment, dulled perception...the mind of one has been blunted.”

The end of verse 25 refers to the “*fullness of the Gentiles.*” This expression has been applied to many things and some of the explanations are wild and ridiculous. In light of the context, the expression is not difficult to understand.

There was, to use Paul’s illustration, *an olive tree*. Some of the branches on this tree were *cut off* (this describes the Jews who refused to leave behind the Old Testament and accept the New Testament). The Jews who accepted the New Testament were *in Christ* and part of the *tree*. The Gentiles who obeyed the gospel also became part of this same tree. These Gentiles might be viewed as *replacement branches*. These *branches* replaced what was “cut off” (i.e. the Jews who rejected the New Testament), so the tree would again be full. Since Gentiles were added to the tree, and the tree was again full, Paul used the expression, *fullness of the Gentiles*. The Gentiles were added to Christ’s body and they were given full and equal access to salvation.

The olive tree in Rom. 11 has gone through three stages: (1) It was once full and beautiful when the Old Testament was in force. (2) When the Old Testament was taken out of the way, the tree was pruned. Those refusing to leave behind the Old Covenant were removed and this left the tree with some obvious bare spots. (3) Now the tree is again full and beautiful, because Gentiles have replaced the branches that were removed.

Those who prefer a different explanation sometimes point to the word “*until.*” It is thought that Israel would be “hardened” **until** the *fullness* occurs. When this happens “*all Israel will be saved.*” The word *until* is used as a basis to deny the explanation provided in the previous paragraphs.

McGuiggan (pp. 323-324) shows that the “*until*” objection is not as forceful as many allege. He wrote, “What does ‘fullness’ speak of? The word ‘until’ is used in two basic ways. Sometimes it has the idea of duration and terminus in it. When used in this fashion, the situation under consideration is marked for a change. If it is so used here we have Paul saying: ‘A hardening occurred and it will last up to the time when the Gentile fullness is come in at which time the hardening process will come to an end.’ That may well be what is meant. There are times, however, when ‘until’ has no such thrust. I mean, there are many occasions when ‘until’ is used and no change of circumstance is suggested when the event under consideration arrives. Let me illustrate what I mean. In Romans 5:13 we are told sin was in the world ‘until’ the law. This doesn’t mean that sin vanished from the world when the Law came. In Revelation 2:25 Christ calls on his people to hold fast ‘until’ he came. He wasn’t suggesting they should then let go. (For other examples see Acts 7:18 with Exodus 1:20; Romans 8:22; and Jn. 5:17, BP). Now, where are we? The word ‘until’ can look in two different directions. Paul may have meant: ‘When the Gentile fullness is come in the hardening process (hardened condition) will cease.’ On the other hand he may not have intended us to draw such a conclusion but rather to receive his statement as a matter of fact. He would then be saying: ‘God hardened part of Israel up to the point in which Gentile fullness comes in.’ (Without implying that at that moment the hardened state ceases.) I think both are arguable and grammatically neither can be disproven.”

Because of how the word *until* can be used, I maintain the right explanation of Rom. 11 has been given. Not only is the view presented above consistent with one of the meanings for *until*, it is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

The tree illustration should not be pressed for exact parallels. In other words, if God *cut off* 2 million Jews, we should not expect to find exactly 2 million Gentiles “filling out the tree.”

11:26-27: *and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27 And this is my covenant unto them, When I shall take away their sins.*

According to Paul “*all Israel will be saved.*” This is based upon Isa. 59:20-21 and 27:9. The adverb “*so*” in verse 26 (*houtos*) means, “in this way/in this manner.” Paul taught the Romans that “all Israel will be saved *in this way.*”

Which *Israel* did Paul have in mind? Was he thinking of the “*tree*” (which is the church/spiritual Israel, Gal. 6:16)? Or did he have in mind the Hebrew race that descended from Abraham?

Paul has already shown (11:22) that not all of Israel (Israel in the sense of Abraham's descendents) will be saved. In fact, many of these people were "broken off" (verse 20). Since there are only two bodies known as *Israel*, and we have omitted one of them, Paul described *spiritual Israel* (the church).

The Jews and Gentiles who obey Christ will be saved. This point takes us back to the material in 9:6-7. Only those who are "part of the tree" will be in heaven. Owen (p. 86) wrote that in the book of Romans *Israel* "has been redefined by Paul in terms of justification by faith. Those who are children of Abraham are those who imitate his faith (4:11-12). Thus, in the illustration, the olive tree represents the true people of God. The tree is composed of wild branches and natural branches, Jews and Gentiles. In the mind of God 'there is no distinction' between them (3:22)."

At the end of verse 26 the thought is continued. The prophet Isaiah lived in a time when there was no "justice" (truth), Isa. 59:15. God's spokesman also viewed his time as a period when there was no "man" or "intercessor" (Isa. 59:16). The prophet felt helpless and wanted God to come to the rescue. God did (see Isa. 59:18-21). God promised that a *man* and an *intercessor* were coming. *Justice* and *truth* were on the horizon. A "Deliverer" would come out of "Zion." God would do what the nation of Israel could not do. The words that Isaiah spoke were ultimately fulfilled in the first century. The *Deliverer* needed by man and the *intercessor* Isaiah wanted arrived when Jesus came to the earth. The 26th verse shows that God gave the world exactly what it needed.

Zion (*sion*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:15; Rom. 9:33; here; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 14:1). Originally the name *Zion* "applied to the hill where the ancient Jebusite city of Jerusalem was located. After this city was conquered by David sometime around 1000 B.C., he had a tabernacle built and the ark of the covenant moved there. As a result, *Zion* was associated with the 'temple mount,' even after the ark was moved to the temple constructed by Solomon on Mount Moriah, a neighboring hill. Ultimately, the use of 'Zion' was extended to include the entire city of Jerusalem as well as its inhabitants" (CBL, GED, 6:57).

Another rich word is *Deliverer* (*rhuomai*). While this term has a wide range of meanings and it is used a few times in the Gospels, it was primarily used by Paul. Paul saw in Jesus a Deliverer. In Rom. 7:24 he used this term to ask *who* would deliver him from a body of death. He spoke to the Corinthians about being *delivered* from circumstances where physical death seemed likely (2 Cor. 1:10). Spiritual deliverance (same word) is attested to in Col. 1:13. See too 1 Thess. 1:10. Peter used this word to describe Lot's *deliverance* (2 Pet. 2:7). Whether the circumstances of this life or eternal condemnation, Christ is the one who *delivers* us. For some of the other places this term occurs, see 2 Thess. 3:2; 2 Tim. 3:11; 4:17, 18; 2 Pet. 2:9. Information about the word "ungodliness" (*asebeia*) is found in the commentary on Rom. 1:18. Those who agree to follow the New Covenant must fulfill their part of this agreement. If people want to be part of the tree (God's covenant), they must turn from *ungodliness* (compare Acts 3:25-26). "*Jacob*" (*iakob*) is an alternate name for the nation of Israel.

The help God gave to the world (according to verses 26b-27) came in the form of a "covenant" (*diatheke*). Covenants were an important part of ancient culture and their value has not decreased. In Gal. 3:15 Paul said that a covenant between men, once ratified, is binding (Gal. 3:15). Ancient covenants (agreements) had six basic parts. There was a "preamble" that identified the author of the agreement along with his title and or attributes (compare Ex. 19:3; 20:2). Part two was the "historical prologue" (the lead party in the agreement listed what he had done for the others in the agreement (compare Ex. 19:4). Also part of ancient agreements were "stipulations" (compare Ex. 20:3-17). A fourth part consisted of the "blessings and curses" (Ex. 20:5-7, 12). Witnesses or some type of oath were also listed in ancient agreements (compare Isa. 1:2). Finally, ancient agreements had provisions for a public reading of the covenant (Deut. 31:10-13).

The *new covenant* gives man all that he needs (Isa. 59:15-21), and one of the things that it offers is the forgiveness of sins (verse 27). The Jews should have welcomed this covenant (the New Testament) but they rejected it. Because they refused to accept God's help, they were "broken off the tree" (verse 20). Paul's word for "take away" (*aphaireo*) is the same term to describe the *cutting off* a servant's ear (Mt. 26:51). When sins are forgiven, bits and pieces of them are not left dangling to our

spiritual account. Sin is completely removed (severed) and we thus have a clean conscience (Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). In Classical Greek this verb was “used of Roman soldiers who were relieved of their duty. Some of its other meanings are ‘to take from, to diminish, to exclude, to separate from.’ In mathematics it means ‘to subtract’” (CBL, GED, 1:494). John used this word two times in Rev. 22:19.

Though many believe the fleshly nation of Israel is described in Rom. 11, and believe a time is coming when thousands or millions of Jews will be saved, a carefully study of this chapter shows that fleshly Israel is not under consideration. Even if someone is unfamiliar with the material in this chapter, Rom. 9:27 proves there will never be a time when large numbers of Jews will be saved.

Though Paul’s point is especially clear from Rom. 9:27, even some brilliant scholars have misunderstood Rom. 11. One of these scholars is Allen. On page 99 of his commentary he wrote, “All cannot mean every Jew from Abraham to a particular point in history will be saved. The Bible does not teach that all dead Jews will be raised and miraculously redeemed as some think. Nor does ‘all’ mean every Jew, without a single exception, living when the prediction is fulfilled will be saved.... ‘All’ does refer to the Jews living at the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy. It means many, a large number or perhaps the majority of the Hebrews will at that time turn to the Lord and be saved. Apparently, this prediction has not been fulfilled. At least, there is no evidence to my knowledge for it having happened. If it is still in the future, the Lord will not come until after it occurs.” Allen, like many others, missed Paul’s point.

11:28-29: *As touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of.*

The nation of Israel is described in verse 28 (for information on the word “*gospel*,” see the commentary on Rom. 10:16). In verse 28, Paul said two things about the Jews: (1) Because of the gospel, they are “*enemies*.” (2) Concerning the “*election*,” they are “*beloved for the father’s sake*.”

The first description of the Jews (they are enemies) is hardly favorable. The Jews are *enemies* because they rejected and opposed both Jesus and His gospel. In the previous chapter (10:19), Paul said the Jews had been taught the gospel and they understood it. God even offered the gospel to the Jews before everyone else (Rom. 1:16). However, they decided to reject God’s word and be disobedient to it (10:16, 21). They had no interest in obtaining salvation through Christ and this makes them *enemies* of the gospel.

Even though the Jews are *enemies* of the gospel, there is also a sense in which they are God’s *elect* and *beloved*. The Jews have this position *for the sake of the fathers*.

Two observations may be made about the Jewish *election* and their being *beloved*. Israel was *elected* when God chose her to be His people and when He redeemed her from Egyptian bondage. For many years, God loved this nation even though it was frequently unfaithful and rebellious. God’s love persisted *for the sake of their fathers*. It was as if there was a “left over” effect from godly men like Abraham. Though men like Abraham died several years prior to the New Testament era, these great servants caused God to continue His love for Israel, even when the people were wicked (compare 2 Kgs. 20:6). God still had a special love for the Jews, but this cannot outweigh or overcome the Jewish need for repentance (Lk. 13:3) and obedience to the New Testament. *Beloved* (*apapetos*) is the word applied to Jesus in Mt. 3:17. It is also applied to Christians in Rom. 1:7. In fact, several times in the New Testament it refers to Christians (Jas. 1:16; 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:1, 17; 1 Jn. 2:7, etc.).

The 29th verse shows that God does not go back on His promises. Not one of God’s promises to Israel has been broken. In the ASV the thought is translated “*are not repented of*”; the KJV says “*are without repentance*.” A single term (*ametameletos*) is the basis for these renderings, and this term occurs only here and 2 Cor. 7:10 (in this latter passage it applies to human beings). In Rom. 11:29 the NIV uses the word “*irrevocable*,” and this is a good translation. God is faithful so He cannot alter His promises; such an act would be a form of lying (Tit. 1:2). Some of God’s promises were not realized because they were conditional and the conditions were not met. No *unconditional* promise has even been broken.

The information in verse 29 implies that God did not regret choosing Israel to be His beloved. Neither did He regret the “*gifts*” (*charisma*) He gave to this nation. The Hebrews were often wicked and thoughtless but God was glad He chose and used this nation. Because God “*declares the end from the beginning*” (Isa. 46:10), He did not need to wait to see how Israel would respond (act). He knew ahead of time how this nation would behave, and because He had this foreknowledge, He had no regrets about choosing the Hebrew people.

11:30-32: *For as ye in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31 even so have these also now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they also may now obtain mercy. 32 For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.*

Paul previously warned the Gentiles about pride and here he reinforced some of what was previously said. The Gentiles needed to remember that in the past they too had been “*disobedient to God.*” While the Jews did not have a spotless record, the same was also true of the Gentiles. Furthermore, there was actually a reversal of roles concerning many Jews and Gentiles. Jews who rejected the gospel were cut off from God’s fellowship. Gentiles, who for the most part had been outside the kingdom, were welcomed by God once they heard and obeyed the truth.

Disobedient (apeitheo), a term that occurs in both verses 30 and 31, is a special word because of the way it is formed. In English we may add a prefix to a word and negate its meaning (*kind* can quickly be changed into *unkind* by adding the prefix). Greek writers had this same ability by placing an “*a*” before certain words. In this case they took the verb *peitho* (which meant *persuade*), added the *a* prefix, and the new word meant *to disobey* or *to be unpersuaded* (i.e. lacking in faith). Writers of Classical Greek used this term to describe ships, animals, and women that refused to comply (CBL, GED, 1:331). In this part of Rom. 11 it means “disobedience to God, mostly in contrast with faith” (Brown, 1:593).

While the Gentiles had formerly been faithless and disobedient, they altered their outlook and response to the gospel. They, like all others, came to Christ through faith (as noted before this was not faith only—it is an obedient faith. Faith is not specifically mentioned in verse 30, but it is implied, as this is the only way to receive God’s mercy. Combine 1 Pet. 1:22 with 1 Pet. 2:10 for proof of this point). Responding to God in this manner allowed them to obtain “*mercy*” (30b). This *mercy* was offered because of the *Jewish disobedience* (compare 11:14). The comments found at 11:14 help explain the meaning of verse 31.

According to verses 30-31, God used Israel’s waywardness to *show mercy to the Gentiles* (30b), and to convince the Jews they needed to return to God (31b). God used the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous and thereby stimulate them into obeying the gospel (31b). Mercy had been received by the Gentiles by obeying the faith and such was also available to all Jews who wanted to be obedient.

Verse 32 reminds readers of the painful truth found in 3:23—all sin. The expression “*shut up unto disobedience*” means all are guilty of wrongdoing. Only after God has issued universal condemnation will everyone be interested in His mercy. All are under sin but because of heaven’s love, there is *mercy* for “*all.*”

11:33-36: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35 or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36 For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him (be) the glory for ever. Amen*

The material in Rom. 9-11 is complex. It was even a challenge for Paul. Bengel (2:134) suggests God’s “*judgments*” describe unbelievers/the unsaved and “*His ways*” is a description of God’s plans for the saved (ibid). God’s ways are “*unsearchable.*” God’s plans and acts are beyond our ability to “*trace.*” They are so glorious and profound that Paul praised God for His “*wisdom*” and “*knowledge.*”

Bengel also (2:134) suggested “*Wisdom* directs all things to the best end; *knowledge* knows that end and issue.” A general description of God’s magnificence is found in the word “*depth*” (*bathos*). Jesus used this word in one of His parables (Mt. 13:5) and when telling Peter to fish in *deep* water (Lk. 5:4). In Romans, this word occurs only here and Rom. 8:39 where it describes the depth of God’s love. An especially interesting contrast can be observed between 1 Cor. 2:10 (*deep* things of God) and Rev. 2:24 (*deep* things of Satan).

Part of God’s *wisdom* is seen in the plan of redemption. God had the ability to devise a plan, put it into action, and complete it with

unswerving precision. Even when the Jews (who were a key element in this plan) rebelled, God was able to use others (the Gentiles) to fulfill His will and complete His promises. God was also able to use the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous. This jealousy caused many of the Jews to return to God.

The *tracing out* (33b, *anexichniastos*) means to follow the trail God has taken. Man is so far below God that our wisest thoughts and plans cannot compare with the ways of God. Wuest (1:202) said, “The word could be used of a blood-hound who found it impossible to follow the scent of a criminal, or of a guide who could not trace out or follow a poorly marked path in the woods.” Aside from here this term is only found in Eph. 3:8. The 34th verse repeats the thought by asking two questions: “*Who has known the mind of the Lord?*” And, “*Who has been His counselor?*” According to Mt. 11:27 and 1 Cor. 2:10-11 only the Son and the Spirit (who are also members of the Godhead) have served as a counselor and know the mind of the Father. Though God has never had a counselor outside the divine trio, “some men may be found who would like the job” (Lanier, p. 86).

In verse 35 Paul asked, “Who has ever put God in his debt?” While more than a few passages in the NIV are not rendered nearly as well as more literal translations like the ASV, KJV, NKJV, and NASB, here the NIV does a good job of expressing the thought. It says, “*Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?*” The answer is no one. God has never created a single debt and this will never change. God has no accounts that He must pay. God is the author of all things (verse 36), and every bit of glory, honor, and respect belongs to Him. In fact, Paul calls the Father the “*Father of glory*” in Eph. 1:17 (that is, all glory belongs to Him). Verse 36 is quite specific if it is carefully examined. All that exists is (1) “of” or “out of” God (originating from him); (2) “through Him”; and (3) “unto Him.” Together these three descriptions point to “the Origin, Course, and End of all things” (Bengel, 2:135).

Verses 33-35 are closely related to some statements in the book of Job. Verse 33 may be compared to Job 11:7, verse 34 to Job 15:8, and verse 35 to Job 35:7 and 41:11. Because Paul was familiar with the Old Testament, and because he experienced a lot of suffering, he may have frequently read the book of Job and found much comfort from Job’s trials (compare Rom. 15:4). We do know that Paul quoted from the book of Job in 1 Cor. 3:19 and apparently alluded to Job 1:12 when he wrote 1 Tim. 6:7.