

Romans 11:11-24
June 28, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Two weeks ago we began our study of Chp 11, and I suggested that we are surrounded by people who need hope and that we are called to be God's vessel to share how they can have hope through salvation in Christ Jesus. But on what basis can someone have hope? As His ambassadors, we want those who resist salvation to know the TRUTHS about God, His character. Because He never changes, we want others to know why the door of salvation is always open and that His light will always be on.

Transition: As we go thru the remainder of this text, let's consider that **all of us can give hope to those who are resisting God's salvation by sharing the truths about God's character.**

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 11:11-15]

V.11:

- Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

V.12:

- But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

V.13:

- I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry

V.14:

- in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

V.15:

- For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.11-12: What triggered salvation being made available to Gentiles? [The Jews' rejection of the Gospel.]

Q v.12: What benefits came out of the transgressions of the Jews? [Riches for the world/door of salvation blown wide open for all of mankind; the world is spiritually enriched because of so many Gentiles coming to Christ – that's you and me]

Q v.12: What does Paul mean by "how much greater riches will their fullness bring? [He's implying that even greater riches will be enjoyed by Gentiles after the conversion of Israel at the Lord's return. Israel's "fullness" suggests a large-scale conversion.]

Q v.13-15: Paul now addresses the Gentiles. Who is Paul an apostle to at this time? [Gentiles]

Q v.14: By ministering to the Gentiles, what did Paul hope to provoke in his own people. [Envy that would lead them to salvation]

Observation v.15: Notice that Paul starts with the Jews initial rejection of Christ, which opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles, but he also comes full circle and suggests a day is coming in there will be “acceptance” by the Jews. In other words, Paul sees the Jews’ rejection as temporary, not permanent. This is anticipated according to Rev 20:4-6. When Christ returns, the Jewish nation will be received again. God never breaks His covenant with His people, and He has promised to restore them.

App Q: In light of these last four verses, what TRUTHS have we learned about God that would give hope to someone who is resisting God? Why should they believe the door is always open and the light will always be left on?

- God is a promise-keeper
- God is in the business of restoring people
- While the Jews are in a state of rejecting Christ, God still promises to restore them.
- God is a reconciler. God desires the reconciliation of the whole world.

[Read Romans 11:16-24]

V.16:

- If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

V.17:

- If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,

V.18:

- do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

V.19:

- You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.”

V.20:

- Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

V.21:

- For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

V.22:

- Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

V.23:

- And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

V.24:

- After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.20: Paul is continuing to speak to the Gentiles in these set of verses. What is the attitude Paul wants them to avoid? [Arrogance – The Gentiles shouldn't gloat over discovering Christ as the Messiah because it was the Jews rejection of the Messiah that opened the door for the Gentiles to hear the gospel message!]

Q v.16: Paul uses two word pictures to help the Gentiles stay grounded in their newfound faith in Christ to avoid a spirit of arrogance. What was the first word picture? [The reference here is to Numbers 15:17–21. The first part of the dough was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. The basic idea is that when God accepts the part He sanctifies the whole. Paul's argument is that God accepted the founder of the nation, Abraham, and in so doing set apart his descendants as well. God also accepted the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, in spite of their sins or failings. This means that God must accept the "rest of the lump"—the nation of Israel.]

Q v.17-21: What is the second word picture Paul uses to help the Gentiles see that there is no room for boasting? [The Gentiles were the "wild shoot" that got grafted into the "olive tree" (Nation of Israel-NOT the church). The Gentiles nourishment came from the sap of the olive tree! Point of interest: Normally a branch of a cultivated olive tree is grafted into a wild olive tree, but Paul described it just the opposite of the norm.]

Q v.23: Paul is describing what he believes will be a future event for the Jews. What is it? [If the Jews don't persist in unbelief, i.e. profess Christ as the Messiah, they will be grafted right back into the olive tree! If God can graft a wild shoot into a cultivated olive tree, he can certainly do it again with His chosen people.]

Q v.22-24: The upshot is this: Paul is saying that Israel's fall, their "stumbling" (v.11) is *temporary*. While believing Gentiles, like you and me, share in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant as Abraham's spiritual children, they do not *permanently* replace Israel as the heirs of God's promises.

Note on biblical prophecy: The professing Gentile church will be "cut off" because of apostasy. X-Ref I Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3, along with 2 Thessalonians 2. All these verses indicate that the professing church in the last days will depart from the faith. *There is no hope for the apostate church, but there is hope for apostate Israel!* Why? Because of the roots of the olive tree. God will keep His promises to the patriarchs, but God will break off the Gentiles because of their unbelief. No matter how far Israel may stray from the truth of God, the roots are still good. God is still the "God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:23). He will keep His promises to these patriarchs. This means that the olive tree will flourish again!

App Q: In light of these last eight verses, what TRUTHS have we learned about God that would give hope to someone who is resisting God? Did you see any Scripture that would lead you to believe the door is always open and the light will always be left on to give hope to someone else?

- God allows free will. If His own people who rejected His Son can still come back to him once they overcome their unbelief, anyone can.

- God is full of grace. [DEB – Circle of Faith starting with the Israelites, their rejection/open door to Gentiles, future opportunity for Israelites to be grafted back in]
- God is all-powerful. [It is not problem at all for Him to graft wild shoots all day long into a healthy olive tree.]
- God’s ways are not our ways. [God did the grafting just the opposite of the norm – because He can.]

LOOK:

Let’s continue what we started last week. Let’s pray that the Lord would show each of us someone in our circle of influence who is resisting God, and let’s be prepared to give them hope based on the character of God.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 551–553). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Gentiles (Rom. 11:11–15)

In Romans 2:1–3 Paul used the Gentiles to prove the Jews guilty of sin, but here he used the Gentiles to assure Israel of a future restoration. His logic here is beautiful. When the Jews rejected the Gospel, God sent it to the Gentiles and they believed and were saved. Three tragedies occurred in Israel: the nation *fell* (Rom. 11:11), was *lost* (Rom. 11:12, “diminished”), and was *cast away* (Rom. 11:15). None of these words suggests a *final* judgment on Israel. But the amazing thing is that through Israel’s fall, salvation came to the Gentiles. God promised that the Gentiles would be saved (Rom. 9:25–26) and He kept His promise. Will He not also keep His promise to the Jews?

It is important to understand that the Old Testament promises to the Gentiles were linked to Israel’s “rise”—her entering into her kingdom. Prophecies like Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 60 make it clear that the Gentiles will share in Israel’s kingdom. But Israel did not “rise”; *she fell!* What would God then do with the Gentiles? God introduced a new factor—the church—in which believing Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22). In Ephesians 3, Paul called this new program “the mystery,” meaning “the sacred secret” that was not revealed in the Old Testament. Does this mean that God has abandoned His kingdom program for Israel? Of course not! Israel is merely set aside until the time comes for God’s plans for Israel to be fulfilled.

Paul stated that the Gentiles had a vital ministry to Israel. Today, the saved Gentiles provoke Israel “to jealousy” (see Rom. 10:19) because of the spiritual riches they have in Christ. Israel today is spiritually bankrupt, while Christians have “all spiritual blessings” in Christ (Eph. 1:3). (If an unsaved Jew visited the average church service, would he be provoked *to jealousy* and wish he had what we have—or would he just be provoked?)

There is a future for Israel. Paul calls it “their fullness” (Rom. 11:12) and their “receiving” (Rom. 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 shall be received again. God will never break His covenant with His people, and He has promised to restore them. (See Jer. 31:35–37 where God links His promises to Israel to the sun, moon, and stars.)

The Patriarchs (Rom. 11:16–24)

From looking at the future, Paul next looked to the past to show Israel’s spiritual heritage. From the beginning, Israel was a special people, set apart by God. Paul used two illustrations to prove his argument that God was not finished with the Jews.

The lump of dough (v. 16a). The reference here is to Numbers 15:17–21. The first part of the dough was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. The same idea was involved in the Feast of Firstfruits, when the priest offered a sheaf to the Lord as a token that the entire harvest was His (Lev. 23:9–14). The basic idea is that when God accepts the part He sanctifies the whole.

Applying this to the history of Israel, we understand Paul’s argument. God accepted the founder of the nation, Abraham, and in so doing set apart his descendants as well. God also

accepted the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, in spite of their sins or failings. This means that God must accept the “rest of the lump”—the nation of Israel.

The olive tree (vv. 16b–24). This is a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jer. 11:16–17; Hosea 14:4–6). Please keep in mind that Paul was not discussing the relationship of individual believers to God, but the place of Israel in the plan of God. The roots of the tree support the tree; again, this was a symbol of the patriarchs who founded the nation. God made His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He cannot deny them or change them. Thus, it is God’s promise to Abraham that sustains Israel even today.

Many of the Jewish people did not believe. Paul pictured them as branches broken off the tree. But he saw an amazing thing taking place: other branches were grafted into the tree to share in the life of the tree. These branches were the Gentiles. In Romans 11:24, 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! “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

To say that the olive tree, with its natural and grafted branches, is a picture of the church would be a great mistake. In the church, “there is no difference”; believers are “all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). God does not look on the members of Christ’s body and see them as Jews or Gentiles. The olive tree illustrates the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the program of God. The “breaking off of the branches” is the equivalent of “the fall” (Rom. 11:11), “the diminishing” (Rom. 11:12), and “the casting away” (Rom. 11:15). To read into this illustration the matter of the eternal destiny of the individual believer is to abuse the truth Paul was seeking to communicate.

Paul warned the Gentiles that they were obligated to Israel, and therefore they dared not boast of their new spiritual position (Rom. 11:18–21). The Gentiles entered into God’s plan because of faith, and not because of anything good they had done. Paul was discussing the Gentiles collectively, and not the individual experience of one believer or another.

It is worth noting that, according to Bible prophecy, the professing Gentile church will be “cut off” because of apostasy. First Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3, along with 2 Thessalonians 2, all indicate that the professing church in the last days will depart from the faith. *There is no hope for the apostate church, but there is hope for apostate Israel!* Why? Because of the roots of the olive tree. God will keep His promises to the patriarchs, but God will break off the Gentiles because of their unbelief.

No matter how far Israel may stray from the truth of God, the roots are still good. God is still the “God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:23). He will keep His promises to these patriarchs. This means that the olive tree will flourish again!

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 483–487). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. IN GENTILES (11:11–24).

11:11–12. Paul asked still another question he anticipated from his readers. **Did they stumble** (cf. 9:32) **so as to fall beyond recovery?** Literally, the Greek says simply, “Did they stumble so that they fell?” But the tense of the verb “fell” and its contrast with the verb translated “stumble” imply the idea of falling beyond recovery. Once again the question in Greek was worded to elicit a negative answer, and for the 10th and last time in Romans, Paul responded,

Not at all! (*mē genoito*; cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1) “They” refers to “the others” (v. 7), the majority of the people of Israel, excluding the “remnant chosen by grace” (v. 5).

Israel experienced not a permanent fall, but a stumbling. It served at least two divine purposes: (a) to offer **salvation ... to the Gentiles**, and (b) **to make Israel envious** (lit., “to the provoking of them to jealousy”; cf. Deut. 32:21). Twice already in his ministry Paul had turned away from unbelieving Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6), and he would do so at least once more in Rome (Acts 28:25–28). In so doing he was fulfilling these purposes of God. But Paul was convinced that Israel’s **transgression** (*paraptōma*, “false step,” which seems to fit with “stumble”; cf. *paraptōma*, trans. “trespass” in Rom. 5:17–18, 20) was temporary. So he looked beyond its immediate results (**riches for the world and ... riches for the Gentiles**) to the possibility of its removal (**how much greater riches will their fullness bring!**). “World” here means mankind, not the physical world (cf. “world” in 11:15). Certainly the world has been enriched spiritually because of so many Gentiles coming to Christ (cf. comments on “reconciliation” in v. 15). But even greater riches will be enjoyed by Gentiles after the conversion of Israel at the Lord’s return (cf. v. 26). Israel’s “fullness” suggests a large-scale conversion (cf. “full number [lit., ‘fullness’] of the Gentiles,” v. 25).

11:13–15. Paul then singled out a part of the Christian community at Rome, saying, **I am talking to you Gentiles**. Though writing, Paul used terms referring to oral communication, a fact with implications for the inspiration of the Scriptures. Paul then affirmed his special position as **the apostle to the Gentiles** (cf. Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:16; 2:7–8; Eph. 3:8), and declared, **I make much of** (lit., “I glorify” or “I magnify”) **my ministry**. Part of Paul’s purpose for magnifying his service to the Gentiles was to provoke to jealousy his fellow Jews (Rom. 11:11), resulting in the salvation **of some of them** (cf. 9:1–4; 10:1). Any such Jews won to Christ would be part of the “remnant chosen by grace.” Then Paul reminded his Gentiles readers that Israel’s **rejection** meant **the reconciliation of the world** in the purpose of God. Because Israel rejected Christ, the gospel was taken to these Gentiles. In Scripture reconciliation is a work of God in the death of Christ which does not *actually* restore an individual to fellowship with God but provides the basis for him to be restored to fellowship (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–20). This statement serves to explain the meaning of the phrases “riches for the world” and “riches for the Gentiles” in Romans 11:12. (When a person comes to Christ by faith God’s work of reconciliation is appropriated to him and he then has fellowship with God and the spiritual enmity is removed.)

Because Paul was convinced that Israel’s stumbling is temporary, he asked, **What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?** (lit., “out from dead ones”) This question explains the clause, “How much greater riches will their fullness bring” (v. 12). Israel’s “acceptance” of Christ is related to “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:4–6), the resurrection of life (John 5:29, KJV). The first resurrection includes dead saints at the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:13–18), martyred Great Tribulation saints raised at Christ’s return (Rev. 20:4, 5b), and believing Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:1–2). The second resurrection will include all the wicked dead to be judged at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:5a, 12–13). The teaching that there will be one general resurrection of all humanity at one time fails to take these distinctions into account.

11:16. Paul was convinced that Israel’s stumbling is temporary rather than permanent and that the nation will be restored as God’s people. With two illustrations Paul showed why he believed this. His first illustration was taken from God’s instructions to Israel to take “a cake from the first of [their] ground meal and present it as an offering” (Num. 15:20) after they entered the land of Canaan and reaped their first wheat harvest. This offering was to be repeated each year at their harvests. The cake made from the first ground meal of the wheat harvest was

sanctified or made holy by being offered to God. As Paul explained, **If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits** (lit., “If the firstfruits”) **is holy, then the whole batch is holy** (lit., “the lump is also”). Paul’s second illustration was that of a tree: **If the root is holy, so are the branches.**

In both illustrations the principle is the same: what is considered first contributes its character to what is related to it. With a tree, the root obviously comes first and contributes the nature of that type of tree to the branches that come later. With the cake presented to the Lord, the flour for the cake is taken from the ground meal, but that cake is formed and baked first and presented as a firstfruit. Since it is set apart to the Lord first, it sanctifies the whole harvest. The firstfruits and the root represent the patriarchs of Israel or Abraham personally, and the lump and the branches represent the people of Israel. As a result Israel is set apart (holy) to God, and her “stumbling” (rejection of Christ) must therefore be temporary.

11:17–21. In the apostolic generation God put aside as a whole the people of Israel, an action Paul described as one in which **some of the branches have been broken off**. The apostle then spoke directly to Gentile Christians: **And you** (sing.), **though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root** (lit., “have become a co-partner of the root of the fatness of the olive”). To be so blessed by God and His grace, however, is no reason to **boast**, which Paul warned against. Since they were like “a wild olive shoot” grafted to a regular cultivated olive tree, they were indebted to Israel, not Israel to them. “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

Normally a branch of a cultivated olive tree is grafted into a wild olive tree, the opposite of what Paul spoke of here. But he knew that grafting the wild into the cultivated was not the norm (though it was done), for later he said it was “contrary to nature” (Rom. 11:24).

To reinforce his warning Paul declared, **You do not support the root, but the root supports you**. The root of the tree is the source of life and nourishment to all the branches, and Abraham is “the father of all who believe” (4:11–12, 16–17). So Gentile believers are linked to Abraham; in one sense they owe their salvation to him, not vice versa.

The apostle anticipated the rebuttal a Gentile believer might make: **Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in**. Though that was not the real reason the branches were broken off, Paul accepted the statement for the sake of argument. Then he pointed out that the real reason the branches were broken off was Israel’s **unbelief** and that any Gentile as a grafted-in branch stands (cf. 5:2) **by faith**. Therefore Paul warned Gentile Christians individually again, **Do not be arrogant** (lit., “Do not think high” of yourself; cf. 12:16) **but be afraid**, have a proper fear of God.

Paul reminded them, **For if God did not spare the natural branches, Israel, He will not spare you either**. In Greek this is a first-class condition in which the conditional statement beginning with “if” is assumed to be true. As clearly stated in the previous verses, this speaks of Israel’s “fall” (11:11), “loss” (v. 12), and “rejection” (v. 15), for “the branches have been broken off” (v. 17) “because of unbelief” (v. 20). This section (vv. 11–21) explains the righteousness of God’s sovereign choice. If God is righteous in temporarily putting aside Israel as a whole for unbelief, He certainly could put aside the Gentiles for boasting and haughtiness.

11:22–24. In these verses Paul summarized his whole discussion of God’s sovereign choice in temporarily putting Israel aside corporately and proclaiming righteousness by faith to all mankind. **Consider** (*ide*, “see, behold”) **therefore the kindness** (*chrēstotēta*, “benevolence in action”; also used of God in 2:4; Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4) **and sternness of God**. “Sternness” translates *apotomian*, used only here in the New Testament (cf. the adverb *apotomōs* in 2 Cor.

13:10 [“be harsh”] and Titus 1:13 [“sharply”]). God’s sovereign choice involved severity toward the Jews **who** stumbled (**fell**; cf. Rom. 11:11) in unbelief and were hardened (v. 25), but that same decision displayed the goodness of God toward individual Gentiles. God’s continuing His goodness to the Gentiles depends on their continuing **in His kindness**. If Gentiles do not continue in God’s kindness, they **also will be cut off**. This does not suggest that a Christian can lose his salvation; it refers to Gentiles as a whole (suggested by the sing. **you**) turning from the gospel much as Israel as a nation had done.

Conversely for the people of Israel, **if they do not persist** (lit., “continue”) **in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again**. At issue is not God’s ability but God’s decision. God sovereignly chose to put Israel aside corporately because of unbelief and to extend righteousness by faith to everyone. This demonstrates His decision to graft Gentiles into the spiritual stock of Abraham (cf. 4:12, 16–17; Gal. 3:14).

Obviously, therefore, **if** the unbelief which caused Israel’s rejection by God is removed, God is able and will graft the people of Israel (**the natural branches**) back into the spiritual stock to which they belong (**their own olive tree**). After all, as Paul wrote earlier, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

The “olive tree” is not the church; it is the spiritual stock of Abraham. Believing Gentiles are included in that sphere of blessing so that in the Church Age both Jews and Gentiles are in Christ’s body (Eph. 2:11–22; 3:6). Yet someday Israel as a whole will turn to Christ (as Paul discussed in Rom. 11:25–27). This passage does not teach that the national promises to Israel have been abrogated and are now being fulfilled by the church. This idea, taught by amillenarians, is foreign to Paul’s point, for he said Israel’s fall is temporary. While believing Gentiles share in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3b) as Abraham’s spiritual children (Gal. 3:8–9), they do not permanently replace Israel as the heirs of God’s promises (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:18–21; 17:19–21; 22:15–18).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1699). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

11:22 Paul’s warning extends to the Christian church as a whole. On the one side, God’s election of Israel did not guarantee each individual Jew’s salvation. On the other side, we cannot presume that all members of a church are saved. The same God is both kind and stern—kind to those who follow Him but stern to those who wander off. Paul issued the warning to “remain in His kindness” or risk being cut off.