

Romans 11 - Gods's Merciful Plan

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." Rom. 11:1

"That is, God had continued to deal with his people in the same manner displayed in all these past examples. Israel remains an incomplete, divided people, and although the unfaithful will again be cut off in the same way they were in the past, God will preserve Israel as a whole through the portion that remains - the 'remnant' (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 272)."

"But the two concepts are distinct ('hardening' in 9:18 and hardened' in 11:7); the hardening of Rom. 9 represents a final hardening like clay in a kiln, while the concept here (11:7) denotes something more like 'insensibility,' 'obtuseeness,' or 'blindness,' better corresponding with the scripture citations in 11:8-10 (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 272-73)."

"Like 9:31, however, these verbs are in the aorist, again denoting Israel's *past* failings and divisions, though the lasting *consequences* of that hardening remain 'through everything (11:10)' ... That is, both those from the northern kingdom in the past who 'became insensible' and those descended from Israel who are currently characterized by insensibility stand outside the promise to Abraham's seed (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 273-74)."

"Once again, the current problem he is addressing is not that 'the Jews' have resisted the gospel but rather that the anticipated elements of *Israel's* restoration seem to be lacking. It must not be forgotten that *even if every Jew alive in Paul's day had embraced the gospel, that would still fall far short of the traditional expectations of Israel's restoration unless the other (non-Jewish) tribes returned in fidelity and unity with the Jewish remnant*, with the nations also subjugated to Israel and to its God (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 274)."

"To support this, he cites a series of scriptures as witness to the divine response to Israel's disobedience, beginning with a conflation of Debt. 29:3 and Isa. 29:10 to show that God did not repair the people's stubborn and rebellious nature but actively 'gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to see and ears not to hear' (Rom. 11:8), ensuring that they remained under judgement for their disobedience (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 274)."

"But in time, when YHWH 'sees that their strength is gone (Deut. 32:36),' he will yet again raise his people up, thereby demonstrating that he is the one who 'puts to death and gives life' (32:43; Rom. 11:15), the one who wounded and will heal (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 280)."

“...the fact that the non-people/foolish nation and jealousy motifs of Deut. 32:21 were applied to the Samaritans in Paul’s day adds an extra layer to the argument, since Samaritan claims to Israelite status as descendants of the northern tribes was precisely what rankled their Jewish rivals (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 280).”

“Paul suggests Israel’s insensibility has resulted in salvation for the nations in precisely that same manner that Jeremiah says Judah’s treachery enables Israel’s redemption (Jer. 3). The logic is the same: impartial justice demands that if mercy is shown to one, it must be extended to the other (Rom. 2:9-11) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 281-82).”

“Consequently, he argues, this also means that the nations now have access to the same mercy promised to Israel. That is, Israel’s misstep eliminated their head start and put Israel in the same position at the nations (11:11-15; 3:1-9), so now the nations may share in the redemption by the spirit promised to Israel (Gal. 3:14) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 282).”

“Again it is important to note that here Paul does not speak of the misstep or insensibility of *Jews*; instead, he refers to *Israel* (11:7), the larger group including but not limited to Jews, and the reference to Elijah’s appeal ‘against Israel’ explicitly brings *northern* Israel into view since Elijah’s prophetic career was in the north (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 282).”

“In that framework, ‘Israel’s’ stumbling, insensibility, judgement, and redemption is significantly more expansive than the fact that some contemporary Jews had not accepted Paul’s proclamation of the gospel (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 282).”

“Because Israel was scattered among - and assimilated by- the nations, Israel’s salvation paradoxically depends on salvation coming to the gentiles (11:11), and like a master potter, God has used Israel’s misstep not for destruction but to accomplish the very purpose for which Israel was chosen in the first place: riches for the world (11:12) and the blessing o Abraham for all nations (Gal. 3:14) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 282).”

“Indeed, the clauses in verses 11:12, 13, and 15 are all nonverbal, meaning any temporary shift must be imported by the reader rather than being explicit in the text itself. Instead, the relationship between these statements should be understood as primarily logical rather than chronological, setting the stage for the reveal in 11:25-26, where Paul finally unveils how and why Israel’s destiny is so thoroughly wrapped up with the fate of the nations (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 284).”

“In an case, the point here is that the consequences of Israel’s covenantal punishment, its ‘casting away’ among the nations, is paradoxically the reconciliation of the world - including Israel itself. Through the inclusion of gentiles, whom Paul likewise portrays as formality dead and raised to new life in Messiah (Rom. 6:4; 7:4; 8:10-11), those formerly cast away are now becoming partakers in the covenant community (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 285).”

“These non-Israelites must therefore be adopted and transformed to become ‘my people,’ a process that involves not merely recognition and reunion but *resurrection*, life from the dead (Rom. 11:15), and new creation. The significance of ‘adoption’ language in this context must not be downplayed. These are neither fleshly children nor foster children but apogeas - legitimate, legal children and heirs (Rom. 8:15-23; Gal. 4:5) with the same ‘adoption’ that belongs to the Israelites (Rom. 9:4) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 286).”

The Olive Tree

“Having just cited the rule that the sacred root sanctifies the branches, Paul extends this principle to the preservation of Israel through the analogous process of cutting off the unfaithful and incorporating the faithful outsiders. Paul’s specific imagery here is borrowed from Jeremiah, which depicts Israel as an olive tree with branches being cut away (Jer. 11:17-17a, LXX) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 290).”

“That God is willing to break off the disobedient is jarring to modern sensibilities, but Paul and his contemporaries had no trouble maintaining what today may seem an irreconcilable juxtaposition: ‘See then the kindness and severity of God’ (11:22). Indeed, such a view of God’s preservation of Israel (kindness) through the removal of unfaithful Israelites (severity) is reflective of mainstream early Jewish thought (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 291).”

“Similar images are employed in the Gospels by both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9) and Jesus (Matt. 7:19; John 15:4-10), who warn that those who do not bear good fruit will be excised and eventually burned (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 291).”

“Grafting of unconsecrated branches into sacred olive trees appears to have been practiced in Classical Athens, for example, as a means of propagating the olive trees sacred to Athena supposedly derived from the original olive tree planted by the goddess herself on the sacred rock of the Acropolis (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 293).”

“God is effectively adding new branches to the family tree, with these newly engrafted branches fully incorporated into the corporate body of ‘all Israel’ as part of the rejuvenation and reviving of the tree (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 294).”

“The practice of grafting was already a familiar metaphor for describing the important institution of legal adoption in the Roman world, so the imagery here fits closely with the language of ‘adoption’ Paul uses elsewhere (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5). The same image of grafting is also used in the later rabbinic literature to symbolize intermarriage and the ethnic incorporation resulting from it (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 294-95).”

“Nevertheless, in another twist of the usual prophetic trope, Paul unexpectedly explains that previously excised branches can be restored into the tree, a striking alteration for a reader accustomed to prophetic warnings about branches being cut off and burned (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 296).”

“This reminder about God’s capacity to reincorporate previously pruned branches is made even more poignant by the realization that the unnatural branches now being grafted in are not branches of other types of trees, a practice also known in antiquity, but wild *olive* branches (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 296).”

“But now, as evidenced by the incorporation of unconsecrated, non-Israelite branches, even the descendants of previously excised branches may now be incorporated into the cultivated tree... In any case, the branches being grafted into the tree (even the wild ones!) are transformed into members of the consecrated tree by virtue of their connection with the root - that is, all the branches become constituent parts of Israel, including those unnatural branches that were not so prior to their incorporation (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 296-97).”

“Once again, Paul’s arguments do not call into question the foundational assumptions about the covenant or Israel’s restoration. Instead, he is participating in the larger discourse about the nature of Israel’s restoration and where the proper boundaries should be drawn in the light of the work of Israel’s Messiah - that is, what constitutes fidelity or infidelity to the covenant and what a proselyte must do to become a full member of Israel (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 297).”

“Consequently, these newly engrafted gentiles have no basis for celebration or boasting against the broken branches - the inverse of the boasting of the *Ioudaios* chastised in Rom. 2-3. Paul thus again warns these unnatural branches that election is no guarantee of salvation. That is, neither natural birth nor unnatural adoption guarantee permanent standing in the covenant, which must be sustained by fidelity (9:30-32; 10:6) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 298).”

“The promises ultimately regard the preservation of the tree and those remaining in it, not the individual branches. As he will reinforce in 11:25-26, Paul reminds the unnatural born branches that they depend on the root - they are participating in Israel’s salvation and their own salvation is part of Israel’s story. There is no suppression or replacement here, only incorporation into God’s one people Israel, the remnant of which will be saved (9:27; 11:5) (Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 298).”