

# Reading Paul's καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται (Rom. 11:26a) in the Context of Romans

Dongsu Kim

Paul's phrase καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται (Rom. 11:26a) has generally drawn one of four interpretations: (1) the salvation of all ethnic Jews,<sup>1</sup> (2) the elect Jews throughout history,<sup>2</sup> (3) the national Jews at the end time,<sup>3</sup> and (4) all Jewish and gentile elect.<sup>4</sup> In the last century, an increasing number of commentators have adopted the view that Paul's use of Israel in Romans 11:26a connotes ethnic and national Israel, as opposed to a spiritual and theological Israel. This article will not adjudicate that question. Instead, I will argue that the main thrust of Paul's teaching

<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Bell, *The Irrevocable Call of God: An Inquiry into Paul's Theology of Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 264–70; Otfried Hofius, "All Israel Will Be Saved": Divine Salvation and Israel's Deliverance in Romans 9–11," *PSB* 11 (1990): 19–39; Franz Mussner, "Ganz Israel wird gerettet werden (Röm 11:26)," *Kairós* 18, no. 4 (1976): 241–55; Adolf Jülicher, "Der Brief an die Römer," in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Otto Baumgarten et al., Zweiter Band (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), 307; E. Köhl, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1913), 392–93.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hendriksen, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 44; G. C. Berkouwer, trans., *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 349.

<sup>3</sup> Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 90–91; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 722–23; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 221–22; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 96–99; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 358–61; C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 576–77; W. S. Plummer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 553; Scott J. Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25–32: A response to Krister Stendahl," *Ex Auditu* 4 (1988): 38–58.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. R. Mackenzie, CNTC 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 255; K. Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols (Zürich: A. G. Zollikon, 1932–1967) 2.2:330; J. Jeremias, "Einige vorwiegend sprachliche Beobachtungen zu Röm 11.25–36," in *Die Israelfrage nach Röm 9–11*, ed. Lorenzo de Lorenzi, MRvB.BÖA 3 (Rome: Abtei von St Paul vor den Mauern, 1977), 200; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2000), 188–89; N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 249–50; Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: The Relationship Between Church and Synagogue*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

in Romans 12–15 is the kind of love that creates and sustains unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches of Rome (Rom. 11:24; 12:5; 15:5–7). This love is made possible by Jesus' accomplishment of redemption and God's covenantal faithfulness. God's mercy shown to the Gentiles in this way would sustain the Jewish remnant's arousal to faith in Jesus. Having been grafted into the single olive tree of God, Gentile believers should humbly and eagerly share material things with Jewish believers. They should, moreover, acknowledge one another as the body of Christ as they strive together to realize the new age brought about by Christ's obedience to the law (Rom. 10:4): the application of Jewish food laws and Sabbath-keeping—both fraught with cultural implications.

In short, this article will explore the exegetical plausibility interpretations that all Israel refers to gentile and Jewish elect by exegeting Romans 11:26a in the context of Paul's letter to the Romans. This article will examine the immediate context of Romans 11:26a; then the olive tree metaphor in Romans 11:16–24; the adverb in Romans 11:30–31; and, finally, Israel's apostasy in Romans 11:11–12, 20. It will conclude with remarks about context as a hermeneutic key.

### The Immediate Context: Romans 11:25, 26b–27

The vocabulary of Romans 11:25—such as *μυστήριον* (mystery), *ἀδελφοί* (brothers), *πώρωσις* (hardness), *ἀπὸ μέρους* (in part), *γέγονεν* (has happened), *ἄχρις οὗ* (until), *τὸ πλήρωμα* (fullness), and *εἰσέλθη* (has come in)—has been variously understood, resulting in diverse conceptualizations of *πᾶς Ἰσραήλ* (all Israel), each based on different permutations of lexical and/or theological meanings.<sup>5</sup> For example, some interpret *μυστήριον* as though God is revealing the chronological order in which Israel will remain hardened until the full number of Gentiles “comes in.”<sup>6</sup> This entrance of the Gentiles into the community will move Israel to jealousy and soften their hearts, thus bringing them to salvation at the end time. Others, however, argue that *μυστήριον* indicates God's eschatological revealing of the gentile believers' inclusion into Israel.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See: Michael G. Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25–27 and the Future of Israel in Paul's Thought,” *Master's Seminary Journal* 3, no. 2 (1992): 141–74; Hafemann, “The Salvation of Israel”; Benjamin L. Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 (2000): 709–21; O. Palmer Robertson, “Is There a Distinctive Future,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 209–27; William L. Osborne, “The Old Testament Background of Paul's ‘All Israel’ in Romans 11:26a,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (1988): 282–93; John J. Johnson, “A New Testament Understanding of the Jewish Rejection of Jesus: Four Theologians on the Salvation of Israel,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (2000): 229–46; Bell, *The Irrevocable Call of God*, 256–78; Horner, *Future Israel*, 253–90; Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 167–92.

<sup>6</sup> Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25–27,” 146; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 358–60. Beker's view belongs in this category. He holds that *mystery* refers neither to a salvific order between Jews and Gentiles nor to a partial hardening but to an interdependence of God's dealings with Gentiles and Jews (Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 334).

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 188; William Headlam and Arthur C. Sanday, *A Critical and Exegetical*

The different interpretations of *μυστήριον* have consequences for understanding *ἄχρις οὗ*. Those holding the eschatological view usually think of *ἄχρις οὗ* as referring to the continuation of Israel's hardening until the end of history (*terminus ad quem*); they will emphasize the manner of how *πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ* will be saved. Those holding the chronological view usually think of *ἄχρις οὗ* as referring to the reversal of that hardening and the beginning of a new circumstance (*terminus a quo*); they place emphasis on the chronological order and time in which *πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ* will be saved.

Another element of Romans 11:26a's immediate context is Paul's use of Isaiah 59:20, Psalm 14:7, Jeremiah 31:33, and Isaiah 27:9 to support what he expresses in 11:26a. The debate focuses on the meaning of *ὁ ῥύόμενος* (the deliverer), *Ἰακώβ* (Jacob), and *ἐκ Σιών* (from Zion) in 11:26b–27. Instead of the Masoretic *יְהוָה* (to Zion) or the Septuagint *ἐνεκεν Σιών* (on account of Zion), Paul uses *ἐκ Σιών*.<sup>8</sup> If Zion refers to earthly Jerusalem, the Redeemer's coming from Jerusalem would indicate that evangelism emanates from this earthly city, which corresponds to Luke's account in Acts that the gospel flows out from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the world. The change of preposition perfectly resonates with Paul's missionary perspective, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16).<sup>9</sup> The Redeemer has come to remove *ἀσεβείας* from Jacob. The forgiveness of sins is not based on the works of the law but on their faith in the deliverer, Jesus Christ. If, however, Jacob in 11:26b is taken metonymically for all the elect, regardless of ethnicity, it is possible that Paul may have considered Isaiah's prophecy as being fulfilled through the fullness of the Gentiles' being grafted into the olive tree as the gospel of Jesus spread out from Jerusalem. Such a reading would still have to overcome the obstacle that suggests that Jacob in the Old Testament never refers to transethnic elect.<sup>10</sup> If that is the case, one may understand *ἐκ Σιών* as referring

---

*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1968), 334; Reidar Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11:25–27," *Journal of New Testament Studies* 38 (1990): 99.

<sup>8</sup> Godet holds that *ἐκ* entered Paul's quotation in Rom. 11:26b as *ἐνεκεν*, an original rendering of a Hebrew preposition *בְּ*, was contracted in its process of transmission to *ἐκ*. Stanley claims that Diaspora Jewish traditions are reflected in Paul's rendering *ἐκ*, for the Diaspora Jews would have expected the Redeemer to come from Jerusalem (Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977]; Christopher D. Stanley, "The Redeemer Will Come *ἐκ Σιών*': Romans 11:26–27 Revisited," in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed., Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSupp 83 [Sheffield: Sheffield, 1993], 118–42).

<sup>9</sup> The Old Testament includes rich tradition of Yahweh's rise from Zion to crush the enemies of his people. See Ps. 13:7, 109:2; Micah 4:2; Amos 1:2, and so forth. Paul may have fused this concept of Yahweh's judgment with the concept of redemption expressed in Isa. 59:20 because the eschatological enemy is not physical entity but their sin of *ἀσεβείας*. See, Stanley, "The Redeemer Will Come *ἐκ Σιών*," 118–42.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Hübner, *Gottes Ich und Israel: Zum Schriftgebrauch der Psalmen in Römer 9–11*, FRLANT 136 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 114.

to the heavenly Zion,<sup>11</sup> which means that Jesus Christ will come from heaven to redeem the ethnic Jews from their disobedience at the *Parousia*.<sup>12</sup>

Having demonstrated the possibility of forming various interpretations within the immediate literary context of 11:26a, we find that Romans 11:25 and 11:26b–27 can be used to support both traditionalist and revisionist<sup>13</sup> perspectives equally according to one's logic and theological tendency. The immediate context is, therefore, hardly sufficient to settle the debate one way or the other.<sup>14</sup>

### Olive Tree Metaphor: Romans 11:16–24

For the foregoing reasons, we turn to the wider context, which includes the olive tree metaphor (Rom. 11:16–24) and the temporal implications of νῦν (now; Rom. 11:30, 31). First, Paul's metaphor of the olive tree echoes Jeremiah 11:16 and Hosea 14:6. Jeremiah delivers God's message of condemnation of Judah and Israel's idolatrous worship of Baal. Where Jeremiah uses the metaphor of the olive tree to refer to Israel and Judah (Jer. 11:16), in Romans 11:16–24, Paul draws on Jeremiah's polemic against Israel to describe the unbelieving Jews as having committed apostasy in their ἀπιστία of the Redeemer (Rom. 11:20, 26b). As Judah and Israel were broken off (σῦν) and killed by the sword of their enemies, so now the unbelieving Jews are broken off (ἐκκλάω) for their rejection of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> The believing Gentiles, however,

<sup>11</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 727. According to Morris both meanings are possible. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 421.

<sup>12</sup> Emphasizing the future aspect of Israel's salvation, Hafemann regards Rom. 11:25–26 as the only "explicit treatment of the question for the future of Israel" (Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel," 43).

<sup>13</sup> I define *traditionalist* as one who holds that *all Israel* in 11:26a refers to both Jewish and gentile believers. Church fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, Eusebius, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine held this view; it was maintained by Isidore, Agobard, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Aquinas in the medieval period. Calvin adopted this view, and Luther, who in the beginning was enthusiastic about evangelism for the Jews, later became pessimistic about the Jews' conversion to Christianity (Horner, *Future Israel*, 1–82; Joseph Sievers, "'God's Gifts and Call Are Irrevocable': The Interpretation of Rom. 11:29 and Its Uses," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, no. 36 [1997]: 337–57; Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9–11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* [New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983]). I define as *revisionist* those who believe that God still favors the Jews and will save them on the national level. This view is held by many scholars cited in footnotes 1–3 above.

<sup>14</sup> Referring to the diversity of interpretations of Romans 11, Ruether argues that "contemporary ecumenists who use Romans 11 to argue that Paul does not believe that God has rejected the people of the Mosaic covenant speak out of good intentions, but inaccurate exegesis" (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* [New York: Seabury, 1974], 106). Arguing God's covenantal faithfulness to ethnic Israel, Horner claims: "I strongly believe that a true child of God will have a distinctive, persistent (though often anguished) love for the Jewish people notwithstanding their unbelief" (*Future Israel*, xviii). Between these two opposite views stands a skeptical view about the possibility of obtaining the meaning that Paul has intended in Rom 11 (e.g., Charles H. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel: The Puzzle of Election in Romans* [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1997]).

<sup>15</sup> In this verse, Paul does not follow LXX rendering ἠχρεώθησαν (become worthless) for MT's שׁוּן but uses ἐκκλάω. The judgment theme reflected in this phrase does not necessarily indicate that Paul links it

are grafted onto the root from which the unbelieving Jews were cut. There they “share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” (Rom. 11:17b). Here the grafting of the gentile believers onto the trunk of the cultivated olive tree may mean either their coming into the kingdom of God or their coming into Israel.<sup>16</sup> The former meaning is tenable in that the grafting of a wild olive branch to a cultivated olive tree may signify their participation in the assembly of the church. However, the theme of church as God’s kingdom is not treated in the context of Romans 11, though Paul does address the issues that arose from the churches in Rome. Therefore, we deem it more likely that Paul uses the metaphor to depict the unity of the gentile and Jewish believers under one covenant with God. In other words, the gentile believers now have become part of Israel. In fact, in 11:17–18, Paul uses *ἐγκεντρίζω* (graft in) and *συγκοινωνός* (partaker) to indicate that the gentile believers have become God’s children (8:16–17). By receiving the Spirit of sonship, they now have become God’s children and, thereby, God’s heirs. Their becoming heirs of God explains their sharing in the nourishing sap from the olive root, which may refer to the patriarchs of Israel.<sup>17</sup>

The view that the metaphor of the olive tree symbolizes the incorporation of gentile believers into Israel encounters several objections. First, Old Testament passages rarely refer to Israel as an olive tree.<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, however, Jeremiah 11:16 and Hosea 14:6 show that Israel is described as an olive tree within the Old Testament tradition.<sup>19</sup> Jewish writings also frequently refer to Israel as God’s planting.<sup>20</sup> Second, no passage in the Bible refers to gentile believers as Israel. Notwithstanding the controversy over the meaning of *τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ* (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16, a number of commentators suggest it does refer to both gentile and Jewish Christians.<sup>21</sup> Third, the word *Ἰσραὴλ* in Romans 11 always refers

---

to the fall of Jerusalem, but he could have cast it against the backdrop of the tradition of polemics against unbelieving Jews (e.g., Matt. 3:7–10, 8:10–12, 21:18–22; Luke 13:6–9; John 8:39–47). A more likely background to the judgment theme of the unbelieving Jews are Deut. 29:4, Isa 29:10, and Ps. 69:22, 23, which Paul uses in Rom. 11:8–10.

<sup>16</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 327.

<sup>17</sup> Moo admits that “it is likely that he would in this context want to stress the participation of the Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians in the root” (*Romans*, 702n27). Chrysostom thinks the root of the olive tree is “Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, the patriarchs, and all the holy persons of the Old Testament” (Bourke, 92).

<sup>18</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 702.

<sup>19</sup> “[H]is young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon” (Hos. 14:6).

<sup>20</sup> 1 Enoch 10:16, 93:2, 5, 8, 10; Jub. 16:26, 21:4; Song 14:3–4; 1QS 8:5, 11:8; 1QH 6:15–16, 8:5–7, 9–10 (Moo, *Romans*, 702). The botanical metaphor of Matt. 7:15–20, Luke 3:9, John 15:1–11, and Heb. 6:7–8 also conjures up the imagery of the contrast of judgment and blessing embedded in the metaphor of olive tree.

<sup>21</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Dallas, Tex: Word, 1990), 298–99; John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker. NTC 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 118; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 224–25;

to ethnic national Israel rather than nonethnic spiritual Israel.<sup>22</sup> In agreement with this, Vanlaningham says: “Hence, *pas Israēl* contains no hint of the size of the group (a majority, or Israel as a whole), but instead is simply a non-specific statement that Jews in the future will be saved.”<sup>23</sup> An utter denial of the sense that *all Israel* refers to Jewish and gentile elects does not seem to be warranted. It is possible, as Dunn suggests, to think of the gentile branch’s grafting into the cultivated olive tree as indicating branches being grafted into the tree of Israel (11:17–24). Dunn writes: “Strictly speaking, it is not possible to include ‘Greeks’ within ‘Jews’; that is simply a confusion of identifiers. But it might be possible to include ‘Gentiles’ within ‘Israel.’ And this in effect is what Paul attempts to do in Romans 9–11.”<sup>24</sup> Here Dunn distinguishes the term *Jews*, an ethnic entity, from the term *Israel*, a transethnic referent.

We find that Paul exhibits this kind of transethnic phraseology elsewhere in Romans: He calls the gentile Christians “brothers” in 11:25. In the Gospels, the noun *brothers* or *brother* is always used by Jews in reference to ethnic Jews.<sup>25</sup> Paul uses the noun inclusively.<sup>26</sup> He uses the masculine vocative plural noun ἀδελφοί to address both Jewish and gentile believers thirteen times out of the twenty-one occurrences of the noun in Romans. The appellation ἀδελφοί ascribed to gentile believers marks a significant change in their status; they are now reckoned to be kinsmen, inasmuch as they are regarded as Abraham’s children through faith in Jesus (Rom. 4:11, 16; Gal. 3:7, 26–29).<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, when we consider this verse against the backdrop of Isaiah 66:18–21, we discover that this appellation has significance in regard to the full number of Gentiles coming in. Isaiah prophesies that God will manifest his glory among the nations through his missionaries from Israel.

Aus argues that Tarshish in Isaiah 66:19 means Spain and that this Isaiah passage would have informed Paul’s understanding of his mission to the Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> The full

---

Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 188.

<sup>22</sup> The noun *Israel* occurs twelve times in Romans, and it means physical Israel in all but one instance (Rom. 9:6).

<sup>23</sup> Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25–27,” 163.

<sup>24</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 506.

<sup>25</sup> ἀδελφῶν μου of Matt. 25:40 may include a transethnic sense. The speaker, however, is the eschatological judge, and the context is judgment of the end time. So, a transethnic understanding of *brother* or *brothers* may have been pre-Pauline, and we can conjecture that Paul applies this tradition in his teaching in Rom. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Luke uses the noun *brothers* in reference to the gentile believers for the first time when narrating the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 (vs. 23, 32).

<sup>27</sup> Of course this does not mean the racial mix of Jews and Gentiles, for unity in Christ, as Davies says: “Did not undo ethnic differences” (W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” *New Testament Studies* 24, no. 1 (1977): 23).

<sup>28</sup> Isaiah seems to have used Tarshish (תַּרְשִׁישׁ, Θαρσις) in reference to the region where Spain is located. “Located in southern Spain at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River,” Aus says that Tarshish was known “in non-biblical Greek as Ταρτησσός and was already known in the eleventh century B.C.”

number of the Gentiles in Romans 11:25, he proposes, “will only ‘come in’ when Paul has brought Christian representatives from Spain to Jerusalem as a part of his collection [sic] enterprise.” If this theory is adopted, τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσεέλθῃ would mean that the gentile converts’ entry into Jerusalem is the eschatological fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that gentile proselytes would be included in Israel. Isaiah identifies these gentile converts as “brothers” in 66:20.

It is probable that Paul regarded these brothers as Gentiles in the nations rather than Jews in the Diaspora, insofar as he tried to go to Spain in order to make the glory of the Lord praised among the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9–12).<sup>29</sup> As Isaiah describes the gentile brothers as an offering to God, in like manner, Paul regards them as an offering sanctified by the Holy Spirit “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16). For Isaiah, these gentile brothers are not only sacrifices offered to God but also in part “priests and Levites” (Isa. 66:21). This means that the gentile converts are incorporated into Israel to the extent of becoming priests and Levites in God’s temple. At the dawn of the new age, brought in through Christ’s coming, they are to offer their bodies as living sacrifices instead of bringing grain offerings to the temple of the Lord (Rom. 12:1–2; Isa. 66:20).

The offering of their bodies as *θυσίαν ζῶσαν* is a priestly act made possible by the grace and forgiveness of sin accomplished by Jesus (Rom. 6:14). This blessing of freedom from the law coupled with the privilege of offering spiritual worship to God is not a gift extended exclusively to gentile brothers; it is given to Jewish believers as well. Both the Jewish and gentile believers sanctified by the Spirit have become members of one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5). Paul calls them brothers throughout. This signifies their unity embodied through justification by faith in Jesus’ blood (Rom. 3:25). Paul augments his teaching of the kinship of the Jews, redefined in the light of faith, by highlighting the significance of Abraham’s faith in salvation history. Physical descent from Abraham has become irrelevant, for *ἐπίστευσεν εἰς*

---

(Roger D. Aus, “Paul’s Travel Plans to Spain and the ‘Full Number of the Gentiles’ of Rom 11:25,” *Novum Testamentum* 21, no. 3 [1979]: 242–46; cf., A. Schulten, *Tartessos*, *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiet der Auslandskunde*, 8 [Hamburg: L. Friedrichsen, 1922]). Hengel also understands 11:25 in relation to Paul’s missionary outreach to Spain of 15:24, 29 (Martin Hengel, “Die Ursprünge der christlichen Mission,” *New Testament Studies* 18, no. 1 [1971]: 15–38). Vanlaningham objects that Aus misunderstands Paul, holding that “Paul’s offering of the Gentiles in Jerusalem would usher in the second coming.” He thinks that Isa. 60:2–3 and 66:19–20 envision Jesus’ *parousia* to bring about the gathering of the Gentiles’ offerings for Jerusalem (“Romans 11:25–27,” 164). However, it is Vanlaningham who misunderstands Isaiah’s prophecy. Isaiah does not consider the tension of “already but not yet” for envisioning the Gentiles’ incorporation into Israel. He simply notes the Gentiles’ coming to Jerusalem as one of the important eschatological phenomena, without linking it to the time of the Second Coming. He may not consider the interim period—the church age—in his prophecy. Bruce also acknowledges the possibility of Paul’s having in his mind Isa. 60:5 and 66:20 in Rom. 15:16 (F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 322–23).

<sup>29</sup> The phrase, *gather all nations and tongues* (והלשנות את כל הלגוים) in Isa. 66:18 refers to Gentiles rather than Jews scattered in the nations.

τὸ γενέσθαι αὐτὸν πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν (“he believed that he would become the father of many nations,” Rom. 4:18).<sup>30</sup> Abraham himself is made righteous not by circumcision but by faith to become the father of all people from many nations who would become righteous through their faith (Rom. 4:16–17). Therefore, the gentile believers engrafted onto the olive tree, whose root is Abraham, do not stay on the tree without making any contribution to the tree.<sup>31</sup> In fact, by absorbing the nourishing sap from the root, they now share their material blessings with the poor in the church at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:27).<sup>32</sup>

### Νῦν: Romans 11:30–31

Having observed the unity of the Jewish and gentile believers in the olive tree metaphor, we turn our attention to another element in 11:26a’s wider context: the adverb νῦν, which Paul uses three times in Romans 11:30–31.<sup>33</sup> After recalling that God’s gifts and call are irrevocable (*ἀμεταμέλητα*), Paul says: “Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have *now* received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have *now* become disobedient in order that they too may *now* receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.” *Now* in these two verses means “at the present time.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Paul does not seem to be referring to the restoration of Israel’s lands after World War II as a sign heralding the dawn of the epochal conversion of all the ethnic Jews. Rather, the conversion of the Jews is being stimulated by the grafting in of the Gentiles during Paul’s own days. Νῦν in 11:30–31 parallels νῦν in 11:5: “So too, at the *present* time there is a remnant chosen by grace.” This indicates that the Jews, who receive God’s mercy as a result of God’s mercy being given to the gentile believers, are not a large mass but a remnant chosen by grace. Whether the remnant is the whole Jewish nation or the Jewish elect, what is affirmed in this parallel is that Paul perceives the salvation of the remnant as

<sup>30</sup> In Rom. 9–11, Paul deals with the Jews’ advantage of being of Abraham’s physical descent, but he does not affirm their privilege over the Gentiles, negating what is explicated in Rom. 2–4.

<sup>31</sup> Davies argues that “the gentiles in being engrafted into the root contribute nothing” (“Paul and the People of Israel,” 30).

<sup>32</sup> “They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.” (Rom. 15:27)

<sup>33</sup> The second νῦν in 11:31 has a textual variant. The inclusion of νῦν is attested by a, B, and D\*. The MS support of its omission is strong as well, as it appears in P<sup>46</sup>, A, D<sup>2</sup>, F, G, and Ψ. ὕστερον is attested in 33, 256, 263, and 365, which finds a wide geographical acceptance of the reading. The inclusion of νῦν is likely to be original because “the difficulty in meaning that the second occurrence of νῦν seems to introduce may have prompted either its deletion or its replacement by the superficially more appropriate ὕστερον” (B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: UBS, 1971], 527). Although the reading that includes νῦν in 11:31 gets the rating C by the committee of UBS, this reading, I deem, fits more plausibly with the general present perspective that Paul maintains throughout Romans (e.g., 3:26, 8:18, 11:5, 13:11, 16:26).

<sup>34</sup> Paul uses νῦν fourteen times in Romans. Usually it is used in contrast with τότε, emphasizing the redemptive benefits of justification by faith.



an event that is presently progressive rather than promissory.<sup>35</sup> This *present* context for the conversion of the Jews resonates in 13:11: “And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” In this verse, Paul looks forward to the consummation of salvation during his own lifetime and connects it to his visit to Jerusalem with the collection within the perspective of realized eschaton.

Paul’s eschatological concept of his gentile mission is not foreign to the context of Romans. In fact, Paul’s expectation of the imminent *parousia* encapsulates Paul’s teaching in the entire epistle to the Romans.<sup>36</sup> The time for all nations to believe in Jesus and obtain redemption from sin in accordance with Isaiah’s prophecy is οὖν (Rom. 16:26).<sup>37</sup> Paul’s call to a gentile mission is perceived as an eschatological mandate to bring nations to obedience to the eternal God. It is not only a means for making the Jews jealous for conversion but also an end for the conversion of τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν.

The present aspect of the conversion of all Israel is challenged by futuristic interpretations of the phrase on several grounds. First, the future passive indicative verb *σωθήσεται* of 11:26a indicates the future conversion of all Israel.<sup>38</sup> The revisionists hold this interpretation in connection with their adoption of the view that the undoing of the hardening and conversion of the Jews will begin in the future when the full number of Gentiles will have come in. What Paul indicates in this verse is not that the hardening will continue until the full number of the Gentiles will have come in but that Israel’s partial hardening began in the past, is in progression at

<sup>35</sup> In this respect, I think it untenable to regard the remnant as a down payment for the future mass conversion of the Jews. Hafemann asserts that the present salvific experience of *remnant* functions as a symbol of hope for the future of ethnic Israel. Paul’s remnant theology expresses that God has those who are elect among the Jews and not how he will restore national Israel to himself in the future (Hafemann, “The Salvation of Israel,” 48–50).

<sup>36</sup> Paul expects the interim period between Jesus’ resurrection and *parousia* to be completed within his own lifetime. See 1 Thess. 1:10, 4:15, 17; 1 Cor. 7:26, 29, 31; 15:51; 16:22; Phil. 4:5 (Aus, “Paul’s Travel Plans to Spain,” 232).

<sup>37</sup> The reading that includes the doxology of 16:25–27 has strong MS support, inasmuch as it is included after 16:24 in P<sup>61</sup> a B C D 81 256 263, and so forth; included after 14:23 and 16:24 in A P 0150 33 104 459 included after 14:23 only in Y 0209<sup>vid</sup> 6 424 1175 1241, and so forth; and included after 15:33 in P<sup>46</sup> in spite of its omission in F G. Scholars who deny its inclusion in the original text put emphasis on the un-Pauline character of some phrases in the verses, such as *χρόνοις αἰώνιος σεσιγημένοι, γραφῶν προφητικῶν* and *τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ*, which resemble the languages found in Ephesians and Colossians that they reckon to be post-Pauline. As Moo argues, however, the language of doxology “demonstrates remarkable parallels to the language of Romans.” Paul’s usual addition of doxology in the middle of his letters is violated in Romans, probably because to finish the long greetings in the last chapter without the final doxology would have been unnatural (Moo, *Romans*, 936–37).

<sup>38</sup> This is a popular view held by many revisionists: Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.578; Dunn, *Romans*, 2.682; Headlam and Sanday, *Romans*, 336; Murray, *Romans*, 2.96–97; Jacob Jervell, “Der unbekannt Paulus,” in *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie*, ed. Sigfried Pedersen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 45.

Paul's own present time, and will continue until the full number of the Gentiles will have come in. This is noted in the perfect active indicative γέγονεν in πῶρως ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν. The perfect tense of γίνομαι in 11:25 indicates the present effect of the act of hardening done in the past.<sup>39</sup> As a result of Israel's partial hardening in the past and progressing into Paul's own time, the full number of the gentile elects is being engrafted into the olive tree. Therefore, it is an exegetical oddity to interpret this to mean that Israel's partial hardening will stop along with the undoing of the hardening of their heart when the salvation of the full number of Gentiles is completed. What Paul stresses in 11:25 is the parallel in the progression of Israel's partial hardening with the Gentiles' coming in until all Israel is saved. The notion that Israel's undoing of the hardening and conversion will take place subsequent to the completion of the salvation of the full number of the Gentiles is foreign to this context. Rather, what Paul is convinced of and finds relief in is that the Jewish remnant's salvation is operative along with that of the drawing in of the Gentiles. Thus, there is a pattern of interdependence between the salvation of the Jews and the Gentiles. Along with the gentile elects' engrafting in the olive tree, the Jewish remnant is made jealous and receives mercy from God unto salvation at Paul's own present time (11:31).

In this respect, it is proper to view the future tense of σωθήσεται (will be saved) as a gnomic future that expresses "timeless truths or omni-temporal actions" rather than predictive future.<sup>40</sup> This pattern of Paul's use of the gnomic future is found in Romans 5:7 as well. Μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται (for rarely will anyone die for a righteous one) does not predict a rare event, but Paul appeals to a timeless truth in the phrase. Βαστάσει (one shall bear) in Galatians 6:5 and ζήσεται (shall live) in Matthew 4:4 can be included as other examples of the gnomic future.

Second, the phrase ἄχρις οὗ of Romans 11:25 indicates a certain future time when the partial hardening of Israel will terminate.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned before, however, the phrase needs to be understood in connection with the perfect indicative γέγονεν, which never carries the future sense in Greek. In addition, we need to recall Robertson's comment that ἄχρις οὗ does not involve the reversal of the circumstance described in the clause that precedes ἄχρις οὗ.<sup>42</sup> This phrase can mean "while" or

<sup>39</sup> Γέγονεν of 11:25 can be regarded as stative or gnomic perfect. Either sense in this verse, however, does not grammatically warrant the future undoing of the hardening of the Jews (See, Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994], 40–42).

<sup>40</sup> Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 119. Wallace includes Rom. 7:3 in this category (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Index*, 4th ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 571).

<sup>41</sup> Consistently understanding this phrase from a historical perspective, Murray says "the apostle is thinking of a time in the future when the hardening of Israel will terminate" (Murray, *Romans*, 2:98); Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel," 52–53; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Zur Interpretation von Römer 11:25–32," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, ed. H. W. Wolff (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), 560, 562.

<sup>42</sup> Robertson, *Israel of God*, 179–80. He uses Acts 22:4; Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 11:26; Matt. 24:38; and 1 Cor. 15:25 to buttress his position.

even “during and after,” thus failing to substantiate the idea that the partial hardening is reversed at a certain time in the future.<sup>43</sup> The phrase *ἄχρις οὗ τὸ σήμερον καλεῖται* in Hebrews 3:13 is plausibly translated “while it is called today.” However, as Murray points out, *ἄχρις οὗ* in this verse is used with present indicative *καλεῖται*, whereas it is used with the aorist active subjunctive *εἰσέλθῃ* in Romans 11:25, in which a translation “while” for *ἄχρις οὗ* would be an unnatural rendering.<sup>44</sup> Thus, grammatically, it is more feasible to translate *ἄχρις οὗ* as “until.” Nevertheless, the future sense is severely undermined by the perfect active indicative *γέγονεν*.

Third, Murray claims that Romans 11:12 notes the mass restoration of Israel.<sup>45</sup> Adopting this view, *πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν* is usually translated in the future tense.<sup>46</sup> It also appears that Romans 11:23–24 *prima facie* strengthens this position.<sup>47</sup>

In verses 23–24, Paul uses the future passive indicative *ἐγκεντρισθήσονται* twice. However, Romans 11:23 does not ascertain that Israel will be grafted back in because *ἐάν* plus the present active subjunctive *ἐπιμένωσιν* (they may remain) does not convey the sense of a real condition but that of an uncertain condition. What Paul stresses in this verse is God’s sovereign power to engraft rather than the certainty of their restoration. In contrast with this uncertain condition, Paul uses *εἰ* plus the aorist passive indicatives *ἐξεκόπησ* (you were cut off) and *ἐνεκεντρίσθησ* (you were grafted in) in 11:24 so as to convey the sense of a real condition with the *εἰ* construction in verse 24. This grammatical structure severely undermines Murray’s conviction that the phrase connotes the future mass conversion of ethnic Jews. As for 11:23, Murray correctly comments: “No assurance is given in this verse that Israel will desist from unbelief.”<sup>48</sup> Earlier in his commentary, and commenting on the same verse, Murray writes: “Besides and more to the point is the consideration that he conceives of the branches that were broken off as grafted in again into the olive from which they were taken (vss.23, 24).”<sup>49</sup> This shows how a good exegete may let his correct interpretation be suppressed by his hope for the future of ethnic Israel.

Fourth, Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 in Romans 11:26b–27 includes the future indicative *ἔξει* (one will come) and *ἀποστρέψει* (one will remove), and this indicates the salvation of all Israel in the future.<sup>50</sup> However, this would

<sup>43</sup> Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25–27,” 150–51.

<sup>44</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.92n45.

<sup>45</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.80.

<sup>46</sup> “How much greater riches *will* their fullness bring!” (NIV). The KJV renders it literally: “how much more their fullness?”

<sup>47</sup> Hafemann, “The Salvation of Israel,” 52.

<sup>48</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.89.

<sup>49</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.86.

<sup>50</sup> Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer: II Röm 6–11*, EKK 4, no. 2 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 2:256.

neglect the realized aspect of Isaiah's prophecy in Paul's own day. As Vanlaningham correctly says that "the future tense verbs may be understood as reflecting a future sense to Isaiah but not to Paul."<sup>51</sup> Paul seems to use these verses in reference to what is already fulfilled during Christ's first coming rather than as something still anticipated by Paul. Hvalvik supports this position comparing 11:28 with 15:8: "In 11.26–28 the salvation of 'all Israel' is linked to the promise to the fathers . . . in 15:8. Paul tells how these promises have been confirmed when 'Christ became a servant to the circumcised.' This means that God's truthfulness toward his promises is seen in Christ's first coming."<sup>52</sup>

If we adopt this view of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, the phrase "the deliverer's coming from Zion" could be understood to mean the Messiah's descent from the Jewish people in his human nature or his resurrection from earthly Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup> Commentators, however, can object to this view because the verb *ῥύομαι* in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is used in relation to Jesus' second coming.<sup>54</sup> The verb used in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, however, can hardly be reckoned as providing us with a clue to the meaning of its derivative *ὁ ῥυόμενος* in Rom. 11:26b. Furthermore, the identification of the deliverer as either God or Christ does not affect our interpretation that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled with the incarnation of Jesus.

In summary, we must avoid reading into Romans 11:26a a *parousia* perspective that does not seem to be Paul's main subject matter in the pericope. Rather, we need to view 11:26a in terms of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, which Paul perceives as an event being realized during his own time. He plans to make the missionary trip to Spain against the backdrop of Isaiah's prophecy of uniting the Gentiles with the people of God through the proclamation of the redemption accomplished by the deliverer. His mission to the Gentiles is not attuned to the outlook of *future* ethnic Israel but to the *immediate* winning of *τινὰς ἐξ αὐτῶν* (some of them) to Christ (Rom. 11:14).

The revisionists may still argue that the present context of Paul's teaching in Romans 11 does not completely preclude the futuristic overtone embedded in 11:26a, the mass conversion of the Jews, or the favor God may have reserved for them.<sup>55</sup> A theme more vital to Romans 11:26 than the temporal context, often

<sup>51</sup> Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25–27," 168.

<sup>52</sup> Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel," 93.

<sup>53</sup> E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9–11* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 162; Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel," 95; Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25–27," 169.

<sup>54</sup> As for *from Zion* as referring to Jesus' second coming from the heavenly Jerusalem, see Walter Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief: Ein Kommentar* (Göttersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohen, 1988), 404.

<sup>55</sup> Berkouwer (*The Return of Christ*, 347), for example, affirms, "[Paul] does not think in chronological categories, nor does he speculate about hidden mysteries, nor does he attempt a narrative account of future events. He is simply concerned with the Israel of his day." With this present perspective of Paul's teaching, he still argues in favor of God's special redemption reserved for the Jews Vanlaningham, "Romans

neglected in the discussion of all Israel, is that of apostasy.<sup>56</sup> In actuality this theme colors the whole epistle to the Romans as well as the meaning of all Israel.

### Israel's Apostasy: Romans 11:11–12, 20

Commentators who are convinced of Israel's restoration often base their claim on Romans 11:1, 11, 15, 23, 24, and 29. Their hope for the future of ethnic Israel frequently makes them overlook an important theological context that God has abandoned Israel for its apostasy (Rom. 11:20; 1 Thess. 2:14–16). They may not want to be mistaken as anti-Semitic by proposing a view that seems to impinge on the interest of national Israel today.<sup>57</sup> However, scholarly arguments that deviate from revisionist theory should not be sweepingly accused of being anti-Semitic if they are based on conscientious exegesis. Certainly no more than that the New Testament should be labeled as such for involving controversial nuances to the complicated role of Jewish law and customs.<sup>58</sup> As Davies so carefully demonstrates, Paul is not anti-Semitic. He is a true compatriot.<sup>59</sup> As a Jewish Christian apostle, he confesses to great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart (Rom.9:2). He would even be accursed from Christ for the sake of his own kindred (Rom.9:3). After these declarations of anguish, Paul's mood shifts to one of joy and relief, for God's covenantal faithfulness upholds the true instead of the physical Israel (Rom.9:6–7). The resolution to Paul's deep sorrow springs from the understanding that the true descendants of Abraham are the children of the promise, spiritually related to Isaac through faith (9:7–8, 30–32).

Paul further expounds God's covenantal faithfulness by contrasting God's election with his abandonment, based solely on his sovereign choice. In Romans 11:1, Paul explains the irrevocable nature of God's covenant using himself, a

---

11:25–27," 163, 173.

<sup>56</sup> Paul does not use words in Romans that carry the concept of apostasy, such as ἀποστασία (2 Thess. 2:3; Acts 21:21), σκανδαλιζέιν (John 16:1), and παραπιπτέιν (Heb. 6:6). As will be demonstrated in this section, however, the concept of both turning against God and God's judgment of the apostates is embedded in Paul's allusion to 1 Kings 19:10–18 and Jer. 11:17 (Rom. 11:3–4, 17). Psalm 69:22–23, which Paul quotes in 11:9, includes both an apostasy language (σκάνδαλον) and its consequence of God's retribution (ἀνταπόδομα). That Paul describes the status of the unbelieving Jews of his day against the backdrop of OT apostasy becomes clear when he uses verbs such as πταίω and πίπτω (Rom. 11:11). Headlam and Sanday argue that πέσωσιν in this verse means a complete and irrevocable fall (cf., Isa. 24:20; Heb. 4:11; Rom. 11:22–23) (Headlam and Sanday, *Romans*, 320–21). In this respect, apostasy is a useful perspective with which to shed light on Rom. 11. See, Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Cranford rightly makes a caveat against this kind of theological *shibboleth* that hinders one from interpreting Paul's theology objectively (Michael Cranford, "Election and Ethnicity: Paul's View of Israel in Romans 9.1–13," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 [1993]: 27).

<sup>58</sup> We do not think the NT writers are any more anti-Semitic than the OT prophets who condemned the Israelites for their Baal worship. See, Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner, *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

<sup>59</sup> Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," 12–39.

physical descendant of Abraham, as proof that God has not forsaken the Israelites completely. God's grace, however, is not applied universally to all the Jews but is limited only to whom he foreknew—his elect. Cranfield, and Harnack hold the former view.<sup>60</sup> Calvin, however, understands ὃν προέγνω (whom he foreknew) as having a restricted sense, limiting the sense of *his people* to the elected people of Israel.<sup>61</sup> These elect are described as those who have not committed idolatry as did the apostates of Elijah's time. The elect have obtained from God what Israel sought earnestly by grace and not by works (Rom.11:6–7).

Expounding Elijah's episode in 1 Kings 19:10–18, Paul explains the dynamics of the hardened mind of the apostates. It is God, he argues, who “gave them a spirit of stupor” (Rom.11:8). The apostasy of the Baal worshippers of Elijah's time adds color to what Paul expounds in his olive tree metaphor, which also is cast against the background of Jeremiah's polemic against the Baal worship that was operational at the time of his prophetic ministry (Rom.11:17). In Paul's treatment of apostasy, several characteristics of apostasy should not be overlooked.<sup>62</sup> First, they are people of Israel, possessing the covenants, the law, the temple, worship and the promises, and adoption as sons from whom comes the human ancestry of Christ (Rom.9:4–5). Second, they are broken off because of ἀπιστία (unbelief; Rom.11:20). Unbelief and turning one's back against God is the central element of apostasy. Third, this does not leave room for restoration.<sup>63</sup> In Romans 4:20, Abraham is described as strengthened in his πίστις instead of as wavering in ἀπιστία. In Romans 11:23, Paul says that they might be grafted in if they do not persist in ἀπιστία. The ἐάν plus the subjunctive construction of Romans 11:23, as Murray notes, does not ascertain the possibility of the undoing of the hardening

---

<sup>60</sup> Cranfield argues that “whom he foreknew” refers to “the general election of the people as a whole, and indicates a further ground for denying that God has cast off his people” (Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.545). Harnack, holding the same universalistic understanding of Rom. 11, regards this chapter to be contrasted with Rom. 9–10, which entails particularism (A. Harnack, *Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte*, Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament, Heft 4 [Leipzig, 1911], 44).

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Romans*, 239–40.

<sup>62</sup> For study of apostasy based on Paul's epistles, see Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*; B. J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> The noun ἀπιστία is used in Heb. 3:19 to describe the apostasy of the Israelites during the time of the Exodus. The author of Hebrews warns against apostasy, assuring the audiences of the impossibility of restoration after falling away (παραπεσόντας) in Heb. 6:4–6. *Contra* Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.570; Barrett, *Romans*, 202–3; Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*, 198. Wilckens says: “Gegenüber der schöpferischen Kraft der Gnade Gottes ist kein menschliches Nein irreversibel” (Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, EKKNT 6 [Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978–82], 2:249). If Israel, which is cut off, can be regrafted in because God's election might include restoration, it would be feasible to suppose that the Gentiles, who are cut off from the olive tree because of their pride, can be regrafted in with belief. This, then, would make Paul's strong warning against apostasy pointless. If Israel alone holds the privilege of restoration after temporary apostasy, warning would become unnecessary, and God would be regarded as contradicting his saving purpose based on grace.

and the restoration of Israel.<sup>64</sup> In Romans 11, Paul is not so much convinced that God would regraft the apostatized Jewish kinsmen into the place from which they were taken as that God faithfully preserves the remnant for salvation according to his sovereign grace. The aorist passive indicative of *ἐπωρώθησαν* (hardened) in Romans 11:7 does not postulate the idea of the reversal of hardening nor the assurance of restoration.<sup>65</sup>

Paul's statement of *μὴ ἔπταισαν ἵνα πέσωσιν; μὴ γένοιτο* looks to have the potential for a reversal of Israel's hardening (Romans 11:11a).<sup>66</sup> Rather than hoping for the repentance of the apostates in Romans 11:11b, Paul heeds the role and function of Israel's hardening in the salvation of the Gentiles. This resonates in 11:25 as the partial hardening of Israel results in the coming in of the full number of the Gentiles. The interlocking nature of Israel's partial hardening and the completion of the gentiles' salvation sheds light on *πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν* in 11:12. According to Murray, this phrase indicates the completeness and hence "a restoration of Israel as a people of faith, privilege, and blessing."<sup>67</sup> But what Paul affirms in this phrase, however, is not the reversal of unbelief and restoration for Israel but is rather *τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν*, which Paul explicates in the metaphor of the olive tree. Their fullness in 11:12 is parallel to "their acceptance" by God in 11:15, and, hence, what Paul affirms is nothing more than *ζωὴ ἐκ νεκρῶν*, i.e., certainty of salvation. Thus, rather than postulating a mass conversion or Israel's favored status by God in the phrase of *τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν*, Paul emphasizes the certainty of the salvation of the remnant and the spiritual blessings of the nourishing sap from the root, inasmuch as they are original branches of the olive tree.

Our view that the restoration of apostate Jews is out of the question in Romans 11 is strengthened by the two Old Testament narratives Paul uses in Romans 11. The Baal worshippers did not repent but were slaughtered by the sword of Elijah (1 Kings 18:40). Likewise, the idolaters of Jeremiah's time were delivered to the swords of their enemies (Jer. 11:16, 22, 23). This echoes God's unpardoning of apostasy in the episodes of Esau and Pharaoh that Paul refers to in Romans 9:10–21. In this respect, it is an exegetical error to think that God's election and

<sup>64</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.89.

<sup>65</sup> Whether it is regarded as constative aorist, culminative aorist, or ingressive aorist it describes the hardening as a completed state of mind that does not reserve the possibility of reversing the state of mind. This idea of perpetuity of hardening and loss is reflected in Paul's quotation of David's prophecy of Ps. 69:22–23.

<sup>66</sup> Headlam and Sanday contrast *πταίειν* and *πεσεῖν*: "a man who stumbles may recover himself, or he may fall completely. Hence *πέσωσιν* is here used of a complete and irrevocable fall" (*Romans* 3:20–21). However, *πταίειν* in 2 Peter 1:10 involves the idea of irrevocable fall as it is used in the context of warning against apostasy (cf. James 2:10–3:2). Therefore, a more accurate translation of the phrase may be: "Have they fallen in order to fall? Never." This can be paraphrased as: "Have they fallen in vain? Never." This rendering better fits 11:11b in which Paul, rather than denying their apostasy, sheds light on the function of their apostasy, i.e., salvation of the Gentiles.

<sup>67</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.79.

hardening mutually affect each other.<sup>68</sup> The Israel that is hardened and blinded, rendered unable to hear and see by God, is not the true Israel and, hence, has no hope for restoration insofar as God will not have mercy on them (9:15). This pierces Paul's mind with anguish and sorrow for his own people. Paul, however, sighs with relief in noting that God's covenant is still effective in that the remnant is being saved through becoming jealous of the Gentiles' engrafting into Abraham's covenant through faith in Jesus.

### Context as a Hermeneutic Key

As context is paramount in determining the meaning of *πᾶς Ἰσραήλ*, it is impossible to analyze the context of Romans 11:26a without reading one's own theory into the text. Stendahl, for example, holds that Paul simply says that the time will come when all Israel will be saved, for he does not mention the name Jesus in the whole section of Romans 10:17–11:36.<sup>69</sup> However, he reaches this point without doing justice to the doctrinal context that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ (1:17; 3:25–26; 10:9; 11:20).<sup>70</sup> Revisionists commit the same mistake of violating what the context plainly reveals when they argue that all Israel refers to the Jewish nation as a whole. This view does not provide a satisfactory answer to "the objection that this makes God partial in a way that contradicts the whole tenor of the first ten chapters of Romans."<sup>71</sup> Traditionalists also tend to read their so-called replacement theology into the text of all Israel and reckon it as referring to both Jewish and gentile believers, though it is a moot point that Paul uses the word Israel in that sense in Romans 9–11.<sup>72</sup>

Being unable to make a purely objective interpretation, one may claim that Paul may have been deliberately ambiguous "enough in Romans to allow for more than one critically justifiable interpretation of what he says about the divine election of 'Israel.'"<sup>73</sup> This, however, violates the very purpose of the rule of literary communication. If Paul intended multiple meanings in 11:26a, its immediate and broader context would spin irrelevantly away from 11:26a. Would Paul then

<sup>68</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.549.

<sup>69</sup> Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 4. Getty holds the same view (Mary Ann Getty, "Paul and the Salvation of Israel: A Perspective on Romans 9–11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 [1988]: 456–69).

<sup>70</sup> Käsemann correctly argues that the doctrine of justification by faith colors Rom. 9–11 no less than the rest of the epistle (Ernst Käsemann, "Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans," *Perspectives on Paul* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 60–78).

<sup>71</sup> Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 32.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Kinman argues that the term *Israel* is never applied to Gentiles or gentile Christians in Luke-Acts (Brent Kinman, "Debtor's Prison and the Future of Israel (Luke 12:57–59)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 3 [1999]: 411–25).

<sup>73</sup> Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 32.



contradict his statement? Paul may be seen to accuse Jews in Romans 2, but he qualifies it in later chapters by echoing hope for Israel. Hayes, pointing this out, argues that we must “pay attention to how the literal sense of Paul’s Bible is at work in his letters to generate not only those meanings he intended but also meanings beyond his intentions.”<sup>74</sup> If this postmodern hermeneutic method is adopted, the propositional value of Scripture is severely impinged, and one can reconstruct Paul’s original intent according to one’s own subjective view. In order to restrain subjective interpretations from spinning out of context, we must properly apply grammatical-historical exegesis to Romans 11:26a in the context of its immediate surrounding passages, broader periscope, and the theology embedded in Romans.

This article has paid attention to this basic rule of hermeneutics without pretending to make an adjudicative exegesis of this historically controversial passage in Romans. Our grammatical-theological interpretive method taken in the context of Romans is helpful in identifying exegetical fallacies. For example, Vasholz says “the conversion of ‘all Israel’ will bring God’s blessings to untold millions, . . . Today a comparative few Messianic Jews involved in evangelism can make the claim that they lead many more Gentiles to the Messiah than they do Jews.”<sup>75</sup> According to revisionist theory, the salvation of all Israel presupposes the coming in of the full number of the Gentiles, which seems to disabuse interpreters of the unwarranted musings about worldwide benefits flowing from the undoing of Israel’s hardening that Vasholz argues for. On the other hand, traditionalists, who spiritualize *all Israel*, tend to diminish the rich ethnic overtones embedded in the word *Israel* in Romans 11.

Both positions need to carefully heed the grammatical and theological context of Romans, not least of which is the theology of apostasy that has not been absent from the debate on all Israel. This would open a new controversy as to whether God’s abandonment of the apostates is true on a corporate level or on an individual level. Discussion of this question will shed further light on the question of whether the Gentiles’ grafting into the olive tree should be reckoned as entry into Israel or the church. This could bring about a new wave of study that analyzes the relationship between Israel and the church. Up to this point, scholars have mostly understood this relationship on a rigid paradigm of separation or replacement. An interpretation of all Israel against the backdrop of apostasy will enhance our understanding of what God has revealed about the relationship between the church and Israel today. Barth’s refutation of the mission to Israel seems to have been overly eschatological for future Israel, thus rendering Jocz’s statement more relevant today: “The Church is frequently Synagogue and the Synagogue is sometimes Church.”<sup>76</sup> The church in

<sup>74</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 33; also cited in Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 56.

<sup>75</sup> Robert I. Vasholz, “The Character of Israel’s Future in Light of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants,” *Trinity Journal* 25, no. 1 (2004): 58.

<sup>76</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2.213. Jacob Jocz, *A Theology of Election; Israel and the Church* (London: SPCK, 1958), 134.

Romans 11, indeed, has not departed from Israel but shares “in the nourishing sap from the olive root” which is Abraham, “the father of us all” through faith in Christ (Rom. 4:16). Therefore, as God’s people, we must stand in a spirit of unity amongst ourselves as we follow Christ by bringing glory to God’s name (Rom. 15:5–6).<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Charles M. Horne, “Meaning of the Phrase ‘And Thus All Israel Will Be Saved’ (Romans 11:26),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 (1978): 330. Wright correctly states, “Paul applies the whole theology of Romans 1–11 to the church in itself. The spotlight falls particularly on the unity and mission of the church, and this becomes most clear in 14.1–15.13, arguably the final main emphatic thrust of the letter” (*The Climax of the Covenant*, 251).