

## *Approaching Romans 11*

Many think Romans 11 teaches that a huge number of Jews will be converted, but they are not agreed about how and when it will happen. Some say it will come about through the preaching of the gospel and occur towards the end of this age, ushering in a time of unmitigated blessing for the world; that is, a massive revival. Others say it will happen in an instant at the second coming of Christ, after the resurrection of the righteous, and will usher in 1000 years of earthly blessing, with the re-establishment of the kingdom.

But such thinking places constructions on Paul's words which he never intended. Such interpretations and conclusions are forced into the text and then read back out of it. Paul did not set out to establish anything remotely like it when he wrote the chapter. After all, we know why he wrote Romans 11. He told us. And that, whatever it was, most definitely was not to predict a golden age – either before or after the coming of Christ – in which multitudes of Jews will be converted, with consequent untold blessing for the world. For a start, *he did not even mention the second coming of Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

Let me start by stating the obvious: Romans 11 comes after Romans 9 – 10, and these three chapters are an integral part of the overall argument of the book. This fact is, as I say, obvious (and vital), but, too often, it seems, forgotten or ignored. Romans 11 does not stand in glorious isolation. The section, Romans 9 – 11 is not an aside or a 'tack-on'. These chapters are, I say, an integral part of the apostle's argument throughout the entire book, which is to set out the gospel (Rom. 1:1-6,16-17; 16:25-27),<sup>2</sup> and they follow, with inevitable logic, the case he has built by the time he comes to the end of Romans 8.

Before we look at Romans 11, therefore, let us ask ourselves why Paul writes these three chapters, Romans 9 – 11.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am not forgetting or ignoring Rom. 11:26-27. Read on!

<sup>2</sup> On my reckoning, Paul uses the word 'gospel' twelve times in Romans.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

For a start, by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, controversy over attempts to bring Judaism into the churches, and the battle with Judaisers who wanted to bring believers under the law, has been raging in the churches for a decade or so, and Paul has been at the centre of it. The church at Rome has not been exempt. This is one reason why the apostle has to deal with the question of the status of Israel in the new covenant. And this is intimately connected with the question of the law.

More particularly, at this stage in his letter Paul needs to raise and answer certain questions which inevitably arise out of what he has already said on the law in the first eight chapters of Romans. Since, in the old covenant, Israel and the law were intimately connected, what now – in the time of the new covenant – of the people of Israel? Where do they fit into the scheme of things now that Christ has come, has died, been raised, and poured out his Spirit, having brought about the end, fulfilment and goal of the law (Rom. 10:4)? From the strongly critical things Paul has said about the Jews in the previous chapters (Rom. 2:1-29), and from what he has said about circumcision and the law (Rom. 4:9-15; 6:14 – 8:4), it might appear that there is no hope for any Jew. Gentile believers might well assume that the Jews have now been rejected beyond recall.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it would seem that some Gentile believers were thinking (and talking) in this very way, claiming that they had replaced Israel, Israel having sinned beyond hope. And some of them were growing conceited about it (Rom. 11:18,20,25). God, it seems, has finished with Israel, finished in every sense! *We* are his people now! This is how some Gentile believers were thinking.

And did they not have some *prima facie* evidence for it? Believers – Jew and Gentile – are Abraham's spiritual children (Rom. 4:1-25); indeed, they are God's adopted children, no less (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26 – 4:7), the 'children of promise' (Gal. 4:28), children of the promise to Abraham. And that promise is the gospel, including the saving of the Gentiles (Gal. 3:6-9). The promise does not culminate in the salvation of Israel! Jews – as

---

<sup>3</sup> Although it is not mentioned here, almost certainly the Gentiles would have remembered the Jews' role in the crucifixion of Christ, and their boasted willingness to accept the consequences (Matt. 27:25). See Acts 2:23; 3:13-15.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

Jews – are not the spiritual children of the promise; believers are – all believers, both Jew and Gentile. Indeed, in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:7,9,28-29; 5:6; 6:15). All believers form the new-covenant Israel of God (Rom. 2:28-30; 4:12; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:11-22; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:9-15; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Of course, it is true that, in the old covenant, Israel had been blessed of God (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5), and ‘salvation [was] from the Jews’ (John 4:22), and Christ had been born a Jew under the law (Gal. 4:4). Not only that. Following Pentecost, the Jews were the first to receive the gospel (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 3:26; 10:36; 13:26,46; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; see also Isa. 56:8; Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24; John 10:16). Yet the sad fact is, the Jews largely rejected both Christ and his gospel (Matt. 23:37; John 1:11; Rom. 3:3). They hated him right from the start (Luke 4:28-29), and wanted him killed (John 5:18; 7:1,19; 8:37,40; 11:47-53,57) – eventually getting their way. And what of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16? ‘The Jews... killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us [the apostles] out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last’.

All this could lead Gentiles wrongly to suppose that the Jews had sinned themselves beyond the possibility of salvation. Paul writes to nip in the bud any such thought. Even as Christ grieved over Jerusalem because of its refusal of his offer, even as he issued the severest warning to the Jews, nevertheless he still spoke in terms of compassion: ‘Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”’ (Matt. 23:38-39). Mercy’s door was not closed against Jews. It is not closed against them, despite their hardness.

As I have already said, my critical remarks must not be interpreted as anti-Semitic. They are nothing of the sort. I am simply repeating biblical facts. And unpalatable facts must not be suppressed in the name of ‘political correctness’. We shall only come to a right understanding of Romans 11 if we face this biblical evidence. To make my position clear beyond any shadow of doubt: the Jews, though they had their hand in the death of Christ, and

## *Approaching Romans 11*

though the crowd at the foot of the cross boasted that they were willing to be held accountable for his blood – ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children’ (Matt. 27:25) – the Jews are no more sinful and deserving of God’s wrath than any people. I have already cited John 1:11: ‘[Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him’, but let us never forget the preceding verse: ‘He was in *the world*, and though *the world* was made through him, *the world* did not recognise him’ (John 1:10). In short:

What shall we conclude then? Are we [Jews] any better [worse, footnote] [than Gentiles]? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one’. ‘Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit’. ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips’. ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness’. ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know’. ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’. Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (Rom. 3:9-20).

But just as the Jews were first in line for salvation, so for condemnation:

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law (Rom. 2:9-12).

In Romans 9 – 10, the immediate context of Romans 11, and leading to it, Paul enforces all this. Israel, so privileged in the old covenant (Rom. 9:4-5), has rejected Christ and the gospel (Rom. 10:1-3), seeking salvation in the wrong way (Rom. 10:3), stumbling over Christ (Rom. 9:31-32) in ignorance of the gospel (Rom. 10:2). It is worse; they are ‘a disobedient and obstinate people’ who have refused to heed God’s stretched-out hands (Rom.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

10:21); that is, they have refused God's offer of mercy (as set out, for instance, in 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 6:2).

All this forms the vital background to Romans 11. The great question is this: What will be the consequence of this disobedience? Because of their rejection of Christ's offer (Matt. 23:37; John 5:40), will God utterly reject them as a people, as Jews? Paul, as so often, raises the issue in the form of a question, which he then answers.<sup>4</sup> 'I say then', he asks, 'has God cast away his people?'<sup>5</sup> And the answer, as so often with Paul, is a resounding: 'Certainly not!' (Rom. 11:1, NKJV); or: 'By no means!' (NIV). That is, whatever their track record, God has not closed the door of mercy against the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

Before we plunge into (or get lost in!) the details of Romans 11, we must take full account of this. True it is, the Jews – speaking of Jews in the round, the Jews as a whole, the Jews as a people – have largely rejected the gospel, and will perish, but, even so, God remains faithful to himself, to his purpose and to his word: 'What if some [Jews] did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge"' (Rom. 3:3-5).

Coming closer to Romans 11, Paul declares: 'It is not as though the word of God had failed'. Why not? 'For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel' (Rom. 9:6). God's purpose in election has not failed. Quite the reverse! It has succeeded and always will succeed (Rom. 9:6-29). So while the apostle is deeply grieved over the Jews' ignorance, and their refusal of Christ, and longs for their salvation (Rom. 9:1-4; 10:1; 11:13-14), his

---

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 11:1,7,11. This is his favoured method. See, for example, Rom. 3:1; 6:1,15; 7:7; 9:14,30; 10:8,14-15,18-19; Gal. 3:19,21.

<sup>5</sup> The apostle is not saying that the Jews are 'God's people' now, in the age of the new covenant. In the old covenant, the Jews *were* his people, and played a vital role in salvation history, as I have explained. But this role has now met its end, having been fulfilled.

<sup>6</sup> How can Rom. 11:1-2 and Rom. 11:15 be reconciled? The Jews have not been 'cast away' (verses 1-2), yet they have been 'rejected' (verse 15). The truth is, the Jews have stumbled, suffered loss, and been rejected, but not irretrievably so. All this will become clear as we go on.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

confidence in the absolute certainty and irrevocability of God's electing purpose stands undiminished. The elect will be saved – whether Jew or Gentile. All of them. In particular, whatever they have done, God has not abandoned Israel; his elect among the Jews will be saved. All of them.

But this emphasis on the grace and mercy of God to Israel must not be stretched or pushed beyond the apostle's intention in writing Romans 11, and read as though God will save a Jew because he is a Jew, or that God will save every last Jew. The fact is, while God will never save a Jew because he is a Jew, he has not abandoned Israel; despite all that the Jews have done to Christ and his offer of mercy, God will still save his elect from among them.

This is what Paul explains in Romans 9 – 11. God's purpose will never fail! All the elect (whether Jew or Gentile) will be saved. Specifically, all the elect in Israel will be saved. And all for the glory of God:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out!... For of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

Romans 9:6 not only stands at the head of this apostolic discourse; it is *the* key verse for the three chapters, Romans 11 in particular. It reads: 'It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel'.

These words, I say again, are absolutely vital for an understanding of Romans 11. Whatever Paul says in Romans 11, he says with this declaration in Romans 9:6 in mind. Consequently, whatever we deduce from his words in Romans 11 must take full account of this verse. *If this fact is misunderstood, or forgotten, all sorts of trouble follow.*

Romans 9:6 could be translated: 'All who are of Israel, these are not Israel'. But wherever the 'not' comes, the meaning is clear; being an Israelite is not the same as being a child of God. What matters is not to be a Jew, but to be one of the elect and be brought

to saving faith in Christ.<sup>7</sup> *And this has always been – and always will be – the case.* It doesn't matter whether I'm an Englishman, an American, or a Jew, or whatever. Am I one of the elect? Above all, am I a believer? That is the question!<sup>8</sup> The people of Israel as a nation had a special and important role in the old covenant, yes, but this is not to say that they were a saved, spiritual people, saved as a whole, as a nation. 'For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children... In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring' (Rom. 9:6-8). They are not 'all children [just] because they are the [physical] seed of Abraham' (Rom. 9:7, NKJV). The truth is: 'Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God' (Rom. 9:7-8, NKJV). There was, there is – and as long as time shall be, there always will be – an Israel within Israel, 'the children of God' within 'the children of the flesh'; that is, there is an elect Israel, a remnant, a small minority,<sup>9</sup> within the people of Israel. This 'remnant according to the election of grace' exists 'at the present time' (Rom. 11:5, NKJV).<sup>10</sup> Among Abraham's physical

---

<sup>7</sup> Do not miss the point. Hyper-Calvinists (arguing for eternal justification) seem to think that election is all that counts. It is not! Paul: 'I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory' (2 Tim. 1:10). Men are saved – they 'obtain salvation' – only if they believe: 'God [is] pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save *those who believe*' (1 Cor. 1:21). 'Whoever *believes* and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not *believe* will be condemned' (Mark 16:16). '*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). God 'justifies those who have *faith* in Jesus... A man is justified by *faith*' (Rom. 3:26-28). 'It is by grace you have been saved, through *faith*' (Eph. 2:8). See also Rom. 10:11-21; 11:14. See my *No Safety before Saving Faith*, Brachus, Wilstead, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For the 'above all', see the previous note.

<sup>9</sup> My wife would buy 'remnants' – small pieces of cloth, material left over after the roll had been nearly used up.

<sup>10</sup> That is, now, throughout this age. See also Rom. 11:30-31 (NASB, NIV), and see below for comments on these verses. 'The present time' (Rom. 11:5, NIV, NKJV, NASB, ESV) 'now', is of the utmost importance throughout Rom. 11.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

descendants, this remnant comprises his true spiritual descendants. Nathaniel was one such; he was ‘a true Israelite’ (John 1:47), ‘an Israelite indeed’ (John 1:47, NKJV). When Paul states that there is an ‘Israel after the flesh’ (1 Cor. 10:18, NKJV), he surely implies (to put it no stronger) that there is an ‘Israel according to the Spirit’, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16). As there is!

The upshot is, while it is possible in some limited sense to apply the phrase ‘the people of God’ to Israel as the physical descendants of Abraham, and to speak of God’s ‘election’, ‘foreknowledge’ or ‘adoption’ (Rom. 9:4; 11:1-2,28) of them as a nation or people,<sup>11</sup> this is very different to God’s election, foreknowledge and adoption of sinners to salvation – those (whether Jew or Gentile) who are saved through Christ. It is *only* the remnant of Israel that will be saved from among the Jews.<sup>12</sup> This is what Romans 9:6 teaches. And it is confirmed by Romans 9:27. The NIV has rightly caught the tone of that verse: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand of the sea, *only* the remnant will be saved’.<sup>13</sup> Only a remnant! *But that remnant will be saved!* These points must not be put to one side when we get deep into Romans 11.

Some think the elect Israel of Romans 9:6 refers to the entire body of the elect (whether Jew or Gentile). Galatians 6:16 would certainly tie in with this. *But this is not the case in Romans 9:6.* In this verse, Paul is speaking of the spiritual Israel within the physical Israel. The apostle is dealing with the question of the people of Israel, Israel as a people, Israel as a nation, Jews, and it is in this context (Romans 9 – 11) that the real Israel, the true Israel,

---

<sup>11</sup> This ‘adoption’ is not the same as the adoption of believers; that is, saving (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26 – 4:7). Nevertheless, in the old covenant, in some sense, Israel was ‘God’s son’ (Ex. 4:22-23; Deut. 14:1-2; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 1:6; 2:10). Israel was privileged in many ways (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5) – principally to be given the law and bear Christ.

<sup>12</sup> The same goes for the Gentiles: only the remnant will be saved. But Paul is here concerned with Israel.

<sup>13</sup> The prophets spoke of ‘the remnant’ time and again. The ‘restoration’ of ‘Israel’ prophesied by the prophets is a restoration of the remnant. See, for example, Isa. 1:9; 10:20-22; 11:11-16; Jer. 23:3; 31:7; Joel 2:32, and so on.



## Approaching Romans 11

in this passage,<sup>14</sup> is to be understood; that is, as the elect remnant within the people of Israel. Paul works on this basis throughout the three chapters.<sup>15</sup> See Romans 9:7-13,27-29,33; 11:2-7. Whenever we read ‘Israel’ in these chapters, therefore, we must understand it as either ‘Israel as a people, the *physical* descendants of Abraham’, or ‘the elect within Israel, the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham’. And I suggest there are only two places in these three chapters where the latter is the case; once in Romans 9:6, and then again in Romans 11:26.<sup>16</sup>

God’s word – his promise, purpose, decree – has not failed; nor can it. All the elect – of whatever race – will be saved. But in particular, all the elect within Israel will be saved. In short, ‘all Israel will be saved’ (Rom. 11:26); that is, all the elect in Israel must be saved. This is what Paul sets out to prove.

But this does not exhaust the apostle’s purpose in writing. As I will show, Paul had an irrepressible longing to see the conversion of as many of his fellow-Jews as possible. It bears repetition:

---

<sup>14</sup> I am not saying that ‘the true Israel’ is always, in Scripture, limited to the elect among the Jews. But in this passage it is. Paul’s concern here is with Israel as a people; the true spiritual Israel in this context are the elect within the nation.

<sup>15</sup> Paul did not write in chapters (or verses). All such divisions in Scripture are an imposition on the text, often highly damaging at that.

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 11:7 also proves that Israel is divided into two, ‘the elect’, and ‘the rest’ or ‘the hardened’. Paul’s ‘countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites’ (Rom. 9:3-4; 11:14, both NKJV), ‘those of my own [people], the people of Israel’ (Rom. 9:3-4), ‘my own people’ (Rom. 11:14), Israel as a people – indeed, as mankind – were, are, and always will be, divided into two; the elect and the hardened. And it is God in the gospel who has divided Israel into two parts: ‘the remnant’ (the elect who will be saved) and ‘the rest’, ‘the hardened’ (who will not be saved). This division of Israel – into the elect and the hardened – is vital in trying to get to grips with Rom. 11. Paul does not divide Israel into believers and unbelievers; rather into the elect and the hardened: unbelievers can be made into believers, but the hardened (in this context) cannot be made into the elect. I will come back to this. As before, the same can be said about Gentiles. Every Gentile is one of ‘the elect’ or ‘the hardened’. But in this passage the apostle is not concerned with Gentiles.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own [people], the people of Israel... Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved... I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them (Rom. 9:1-4; 10:1; 11:13-14).

With this burning in his heart, the apostle wrote this section of Romans (and Romans 11 in particular) to stimulate – provoke – as many Jews as he could to come to Christ. The apostle stressed his evangelistic motive in all this, spelling it out both here as well as elsewhere. As he said, he would use ‘any means’ in order to ‘provoke’ as many Jews as possible to conversion: ‘I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them’ (Rom. 11:13-14).<sup>17</sup> And this is precisely what he is doing here.

And this is not the only time he said something of the sort, making bare the feelings of his heart. As he told the Corinthians:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

And we know the source of such a motive, where Paul found it: ‘Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men... If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us for such a desire’ (2 Cor. 5:10-14). He could tell the Ephesian elders: ‘I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know

---

<sup>17</sup> Note the ‘some’. Once again, we meet an apostolic emphasis which is far removed from the triumphalist claims.

## *Approaching Romans 11*

that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus' (Acts 20:19-21). And when he was at Corinth: 'Every sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks' (Acts 18:4).

But all this is a far cry from the extravagant expectations expressed by so many when they comment on Romans 11. The apostle certainly had nothing in mind corresponding to the triumphalist view which they put forward. Do not miss his desire: 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save *some*' (1 Cor. 9:22), and: 'I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save *some* of them' (Rom. 11:13-14). Why did he not add – when he was talking about the conversion of Jews – something like: 'But in the end, as I have explained, a huge number of Jews will be saved in a glorious revival'? Why did he speak in such limited terms, and why was his aim so realistically confined? Why? And if he was predicting such a massive conversion rate, why was he so anxious that Jews might not be saved?

Let me sum up. Christ has fulfilled the law, the old covenant, and established the new covenant with his law as the law of God. This, however, does not mean that God has no saving purpose for Jews. The Gentiles must not become proud. True, the Jews in general have done despite to Christ and his gospel, and God has taken the gospel out to the Gentiles, but this does not mean that the Jews are no longer included in the gospel offer. God still has his elect among them. Furthermore, although the Jews have, in general, proved hard to the gospel, this does not mean that God's eternal decree has failed. And, finally, Paul, clearly moved at the thought that any Jew might perish, writes in such a way as will stir as many Jews as possible to come to Christ and be saved.

Having set the scene, we are now ready to look at Romans 11 in a little more detail. As we set out, we must keep in mind these two main questions:

## *Approaching Romans 11*

1. How does Paul prove that not only will all the elect be saved, but that, in particular, all elect Jews will be saved – even though, as a people, Israel has done such despite to Christ and his gospel?
2. How does Paul try to move his fellow-Jews to come to Christ, doing all he can to arouse as many of them as possible to be converted?

In all this – in proving that God will still show mercy to Jews, that God will allow nothing to thwart him in his everlasting purpose to show mercy to the elect, and in seeking to move his fellow-Jews – we shall meet Paul’s ultimate motive. We shall see how the apostle exalts God, how he moves us to magnify God for his wisdom, grace and mercy to sinners. Indeed, as Paul will demonstrate, throughout what seems to us to be all the tortuous, chaotic, and often sad unfolding of events in history, God has always been accomplishing his purpose; namely that every last elect sinner will be everlastingly saved. It is not only in the past: throughout this age, even now, God is accomplishing his plan. And he will carry out his purpose to the end, and complete it! And in and through it all, through every twist and turn of the way, God is always bringing glory to himself through Jesus Christ in the salvation of sinners, whether Jew or Gentile.

I know I have already quoted Paul’s climax to Romans 11 – and will quote it again – but it needs to be constantly borne in mind as we read this chapter. This is what the apostle is working towards all through Romans 9 – 11. Israel is not the climax! God – his glory – is:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!...  
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

Therefore, whatever interpretation of Romans 11 we finally settle on, it cannot be right if it does not move us to long for both Jews and Gentiles to be saved, and, above all, if it does not leave us with the apostle’s sense of the wonder of God’s sovereign purpose and grace. When we reach the end of the chapter, the worship of God must be the note that is left ringing in our ears and pulsating through our hearts.