# Wednesday Night Men’s Bible Study

# Romans 11:7-24

# December 6, 2023

Our study is well divided into three sections:

1. The hardening of Israel in response to rejection - Romans 11:7-10
2. Causing Jewish jealousy by the Gentiles - Romans 11:11-16
3. The holy tree and branches – Romans 11:17-24

# Romans 11:7-10 The hardening of Israel in response to rejection

Paul moves from the example of Elijah and the remnant to the means of salvation.

# **What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;**

# **just as it is written: “GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.”**

# **And David says, “MAY THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.**

# **“MAY THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS CONTINUALLY.”**

# **I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? Far from it! But by their wrongdoing salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.**

# **Now if their wrongdoing proves to be riches for the world, and their failure, riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!**

 **Verse 7** – There is no doubt that Israel was seeking. In their looking here and there for God’s approval, but they did not look in the right places. They substituted acts for faith. I can only assume they were not looking at the scriptures but in their own works, because they did not find what they were looking for. If they had truly looked for, they would have found Him. AS Jeremiah said in 29:13, “**And you shall seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.”** They did not find righteousness because they were not seeking in the right, faithful led way.

Some, the true Israel, the faithful, the remnant of the whole found it. By faith they lived it.

But I am struck by the phrase, “**The rest were hardened.”** They were blinded to a point they settled simply gave up. They closed up their eyes against the light that made them guilty. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 called it a “**strong delusion”** and a “**working of error”.**

The result of living by works and not by faith was and is terrible. Israel failed to obtain the salvation which it sought. Israel was represented to God by a select few by faith. But the most horrific state remained of complete spiritual apathy and indifference, and this works based religion, became a **curse and a snare.**

**NOTE # 1:** A portion of Christianity sees this verse, the word “chosen” or in other translations “elect” and screams out “LOOK IT IS THERE”! “WE ARE RIGHT”. “WE ARE VINDICATED”. “YOU WHO DO NOT BELIEVE OUR WAY ARE TOTALLY WRONG.” They would see the doctrine of election being entirely proved by this verse. They are totally in on this verse. Make a banner, put up a billboard. But there is a problem. Application of one word and applying a specific and unitarian definition no matter the context and the author’s viewpoint can lead to false understanding.

The word JUSTIFY can be attached to the belief of Godly action and grace. But it also can mean to build a wall of the temple to be straight up and down and therefore has little to do with faith.

Additionally the word SAVED is not always associated with the faithful grace of God in response to my faith. You can save me from the belly of a fish and you can save me from drowning.

True it makes it harder to study the Bible with all these different meanings, but to take the world elect or chosen and always associating it with predestination and determinism is not wise study of the Bible. Sometimes a word is just a word to describe something.

Deep divers such as you and I can not associated any one word with a spiritual doctrine.

So who is the chosen the elect here in this verse. In context we have to point to a sub set of Israel the remnant. A portion of the Jews did find what they were seeking. Most did not.

For my Calvinist brothers in this verse, I must ask, “If God has chosen from all time who is to be saved then why does he have to blind them?. Do you have to blind the dead?” If total depravity is true, there is no ability to comprehend God, then why does God actively have to blind Israel.

**Verse 8** - The spirit of **stupor**.— There are differences in translation of this state of being. It could be as in NASB and NIV or slumber in RSV and KJV stupor. The quotation is a free combination of two passages of the LXX. (Isaiah 29:10, and Deuteronomy 29:4), no doubt put together by the Apostle from memory.

Simply, God saw their attitude of works over faith and responded. All the blessings of God to Israel, small or large, prayed for or not, meager or plentiful can be a trap. The trap is seeing these blessings are the product of my work. It is all me, me, me. It is my effort.

It is “Little Jack Horner sat in a corner eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in a thumb and pulled out a plum and said, "What a good boy am I."

**NOTE # 2:** Many writers on this verse point to a concept called, “JUDICIAL HARDENING”. It is a concept which means, “you get what you do”. Your actions have recompence, retribution, or reward. Substituting works for faith has a long term judgement but a current effect. You do not look in the right places, you will become less likely to find what you are looking for. Beating your head against the wall will get you a headache. Because you are working with the intent or motive to become worthy, that effort not only is worthless because it makes grace worthless, but it is judged as a sin with the immediate effect of hardening.

**The more you reject grace the more darkness comes.**

Pride in effort equates to restrictions to progress. Pride in what I have accomplished blinds me to God’s grace. Pride in works leads to our ears to be plugged.

**Verse 9** - It appears highly improbable that this Psalm was really written by David. Nor can the Davidic authorship be argued strongly from this passage, as “David” merely seems to stand for the Book of Psalms, with which his name was traditionally connected. Paul was quoting from the Greek version of the Old Testament. In the original of Psalms 69 these verses refer to the fate invoked by the psalmist upon his persecutors; here they are applied by St. Paul to the will of the Almighty which had been pronounced against the unbelieving people of Israel.

Let their table be a trap. When they are eating and drinking securely, let them be caught as in a trap; let their security itself deceive them. By “recompence unto them” the Apostle means, Let their prosperity bring upon them retaliation for what they have done—namely, for their rejection of Christ.

**Verse – 10 -** Bow down thou their back always is reference to the perpetual nature of the sentence imposed upon Israel, not referring exclusively to their being perpetually subjected, but to the endurance of the hardened condition finally imposed.

It seems to be a pronouncement of rejection not of the nation of Israel but to the majority that have been darkened by their won lack of faith. Similarly, the shaking of the loins is expressive of terror and dismay and feebleness.”

## **Romans 11:11-16 Good Jealousy**

1. **I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.**
2. **Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!**
3. **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,**
4. **If somehow, I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.**
5. **For if the rejection be reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**
6. **And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches too.**

**Verse 11** – **I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous**.

Paul seems to be asking quite a number of questions. This is the style of teaching to which Paul received from Gamaliel who followed the Greek methodology of questions to bring to conclusions.

It must be pointed out in the King James Version this verse is**: I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.** It uses four pronouns: they, they, their, them. And further two different Greek words are translated as one: FALL.

### It is all Greek to me

STUMBLE – **ptaíō** – to trip upon some impediment, the act making a mistake or sin.

FALL – **píptō** - to descend from a higher place to a lower, to fall (either from or upon) to be thrust down, to descend from an erect to a prostrate position. It is seen as a condition from which can be overcome. Fall is the end result or state of existance.

TRANSGRESSION – **paráptōma** – to trespass, transgression, sin against, to sin as a moral failure to keep a command, figuratively, a stepping out of the bounds of God's law

### Check your pronouns

Two times Paul uses the word “they” and we must settle on who is being referred to. Is Paul referring to two different groups? Or are these referring to the same group

Who is stumbling? In context again it is Israel as a whole, it is inferred by the context that this act of tripping, loosing balance and in mid fall. It is action that has not been completed.

Who could fall? The act of stumbling causes a state of being. Stumble then fallen I have fallen and I can’t get up. Is one part stumbling cause all to fall. I would think the first they is the unfaithful Israel causing the total, including the faithful to fall.

The question in this verse is this stumbling a cause of Israel being beyond recovery? Their struggle, their failures, their sin was the cause of their rock in the smooth path. Are they beyond the “dead line of rejection?” Have they reached a state in which they can not get back up? Or is the Jewish nation stricken but not destroyed. Hurting, bruised, with a concussion, but with hope.

Here Paul uses the word transgression again. This moral failure of Israel as a contrast to the opposite: Fullness. All the transgressions, all the works based efforts, all the God imposed exiles, all the pride, all the self-righteousness are now compared to the perfection of fullness.

A few things here:

1. **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose** Romans 8:28. They stumbled not to let them to wallow in the dirt never to be used of God. The Jews had a purpose and they tripped, they stumbled but God’s plan was to use problem. The very act of tripping was to bring salvation to the gentiles.
2. God did not cause them to stumble. God has always had provision of picking them up, dusting them off and restoration.
3. God is not the force that made them trip. God does not hide in the bushes and when we least expect it He sticks out his leg and trips you, just to see you fall down.
4. Paul in his missionary journeys always went to the local synagogue in every city, town or berg, first. Some would receive his messiah message. When the opportunity was given and all that would accept, when no one else came, Paul left and went to the Gentiles. The Jewish stumbling day after day became the reason for Paul to go elsewhere. The rejection became the reason for moving on to the Gentiles.
5. Sometimes you just have to move on. After every effort is made to reveal the truth, to un-blind people there has to be a time you must move on.
6. Some peoples rejection will soften others. Hard minds still will cause others to soften. If they do not want, let others have it. The rejection of the gospel on the part of the Jews was the means of its wider and more rapid spread among the Gentiles
7. There is good Jealousy if it draws you to God.

Did fleshly Israel then stumble so completely as to involve even the spiritual Israel also in their fall? God forbid. Just the opposite happened, because their fall has greatly advanced the conversion of Gentiles, thus provoking the old Israel to increased acts of violence against the faith, through their jealousy.

**Verse – 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!**

The thought here for fullness is first a cup to the very top or filled to the full or in the fullness of time, or a full complement of sailors on a ship, or to a place where there is no lack. Israel in Paul’s time was all lack. Their ship was not full, their cup was not full, Israel was not full. But the cup was still there. Ready to be filled again. God is using the stumbling, the fall and the well wetted cup for a purpose. God tripped them up It will happen. It will come to a time when Israel comes to the fullness of their planned destiny, but just not now.

It would be easy to say the use of the word transgression and failure are equal. But there is much difference. Transgression as we have seen in verse is an act of rejection but failure is different in that it is not the act but the result. It means to diminish to make less.

Commentators such as Barrett, Whiteside and Cuffman associate this transgression of the Jews as the sinful act of rejection and crucifixion of Jesus.

**Their fullness**. In these words are a hope and expectation. It is a shadow of promise of future events. It seems to me a projected return in the future of the old fleshly Israel to a spirituality and obedience they have been void of for thousands of years, accompanied by a massive and universal conversion of the whole world to Jesus Christ. Please God make it be so!

**Verse – 13, 14, 15** **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, If somehow, I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if the rejection be reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

My hope is that all are saved. My expectation is less than that. Some will never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus by faith and forgiveness. It is sad to take Paul’s view that **some** of the Jews will be saved.

**Provoke to jealousy** – Speaking to the minority in the church, the Gentiles to whom he was called the apostle of the Gentiles, one of his hopes is that the number and faithfulness of them would incite some emotion of jealousy. Stur up the pot of cold stew and put a fire under them.

The mention of "fullness" in verse 12 could well be understood as : "And if even their loss is your gain, think what the conversion of a few of them can mean; and, with that in view, I am ready to provoke all of them in the hopes of saving some."

Coffman rewrites verse 15: For if the casting away of them the reconciling of the world, what the receiving but life from the dead?

Coffman continues to write:

“What was Paul saying? He had just mentioned the possibility of saving a few Jews; and it was of them that he said, "What the receiving but life from the dead"! Every Jew Paul converted was viewed by him as one baptized out of a cemetery. The hardened, judicially condemned and sentenced nation (fleshly Israel) was morally and judicially dead. Yet even from THAT NATION some were being saved, and the converts were indeed as life from deadness!”

It is a grand thought that every Gentile saved has an opportunity to bring jealousy and ultimately salvation to the Jews. There have been billions in the last 1990 years worshiping a crucified Jew. The whole world has heard the name of this Jew. These billions have claimed to have a relationship to this Jew. These billions have continually and with much understanding have taught the texts of the Jewish Bible. Billions of people who have and now see the Jews as a mission field.

**Anyone can be saved: Jews, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, LGBTQ++, black, white, Asian, American, Syrian, Iranian, your terrible neighbor, the hardened, the pillars of rejection, Baptists, Calvinists, Catholics, Mormons, the guy on the freeway offramp, Bill Gates, Dave, the blinded, the deaf, the hansom and the disfigured, the born and the unborn, convict, murderer, rapist, thief, the guy that cuts you off on the freeway. All can be saved.**

Jewish rejection brings the to the world to Jesus. And when the world comes to Jesus then they can bring Jesus to the Jews. We can bring life to the dead.

I pray for a Jewish revival. I pray for life in the dead. The prodigal son can always come home. No one is to far off.

**Verse – 16 And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches too.**

The lump taken from the whole is separated as an offering to God as the first of all. But the whole is just as holy. There are two metaphors saying the same thing.

From Numbers 15:20 it tells the baker to take a lump off and set it aside as an offering to God. And then Paul starts a section on olive trees and compares a holy tree with holy roots that produces holy branches. Since God had so graciously accepted the first Jewish converts, all Jews who would accept the Lord would likewise be accepted.

Both of these examples or illustrations is referring to ancient Israel we studied in Chapter 9 and 10. It is a stretch to stick Jesus in here. He is talking about Israel.

## **Section 3 of our study Verses 17-24**

This section is an extended metaphor of a holy olive tree which loses some branches and others are grafted on. The major idea here is: “What God starts as a good work in Israel will be faithful to complete it.”

It seems as though Paul had made the statement in Verse 16 of the heavenly root and now wants to make sure that both the Gentiles and the Jews of the Roman church understood exactly what he had written.

**Verse – 17, 18, 19 - But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”**

**Broken off** is a reference to pruning. Jesus used this same metaphor when He said God is the tree and you are the branches.

**Wild olive –** again the gentiles. It took time for the graft to take hold. The Gentile inclusion was slow at first. The rest of the branches were hesitant to accept these different branches. Wild is a reference to the Jewish view of the Gentiles being inferior to them. The Jews saw themselves as more learned and had accepted God into their life even if it was by the law.

**Among them –** again a number of sources tried to translate this as instead of them. That the grafting of the wild was replacement of the natural.

**Do not be arrogant** - This was Paul’s warning of the Gentile Christians not to fall into the same foolish and fatal error that had destroyed the old Israel. Of that Israel, their pride of possessing God’s law, and their superior knowledge, had led them into all kinds of boasting against the Gentiles; and, at the time Paul wrote (58 A.D.), the character of God’s church was leaning more and more toward a preponderantly Gentile composition; and, alas, this presented an opportunity for the Gentiles to develop the same boastful and inconsiderate attitude as that which once marked the feelings of the Jews toward them.

Arrogance takes a voice. Don’t ever assume the reason for the missing branches are not any excuse to say, “God prefers me to the Jews; God broke them off and put me in their place.” Total arrogance.

**Verse 20, 21 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.**

**Conceit** - These broken off branches were not because God preferred the wild were better but because they did not perform to the expectations of God. Absolutely it made space on the root but don’t be so conceited to think it was just to make space for you.

**Fear -**  These branches were removed because of their unbelief. And your unbelief can also result in the same result.

It is important to know in the event that Gentiles should also show the same qualities of unbelief and stubbornness which was exhibited by the life of fleshly Israel, the consequences for them will be the same. Do not become so comfortable in your Christian life to assume an everlasting decree and you are endowed with freedom of the will to act as you choose to act and still be well grafted into the root. This verse shows that exactly the same principles of God’s judgment are applied to Jews and Gentiles alike with impartiality.

**Verse 22-24 - See then the kindness and severity of God: to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; for otherwise you too will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?**

**Grafted -** Paul continues the agricultural metaphor begun in v. 16. The grafting of wild olive branches into an established tree helped improve yields.

**The olive tree** - This is a symbol of national Israel This is Paul’s second OT metaphor to describe the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

There seems to be an inference that there was a problem in the Roman Church. The problem was an attitude of arrogance on the part of the Gentiles toward the Jews. The minority thought they were better than the majority. 11:18 “do not be arrogant toward the branches”

Further there seems to be a statement of the conditionality of the branch to their attachment. This condition is four parts:

1. an initial faith response;
2. a state of being in faith;
3. an ongoing process of faith; and
4. a final culmination of faith.

Be careful of any theological system that only focuses on one of these biblical truths. God is the author, initiator, sustainer, and culminated in salvation, but in a covenant pattern. He has chosen that sinful mankind must respond and continue to respond by repentance and faith at every step of the process.

**Verse 22** states the “**the kindness and severity of God”** God’s ways always seem paradoxical to fallen humanity. There are consequences to our choices. God’s election does not negate mankind’s responsibility. The election of national Israel did not guarantee each individual’s salvation.

**“if you continue in His kindness.** This sentence in Greek tells us that believing Gentile continuance is conditional (this is the flip side of God’s sovereignty of Rom. 9); we must be diligent to maintain our faith (Phil. 2:12-13). This refers to the perseverance of both the group and the individual Gal. 6:9; Rev. 2:7,17; 3:6,13,22. This is the mystery and tension of total and individuality in the Bible. There are both promises (based on God’s character) and conditional covenants (based on human response).

**11:23** This verse follows the grammatical and theological pattern of v. 22. If the Jews repent and believe, they will be included. If the Gentiles cease to believe, they will be rejected. Initial faith in Christ and continual faith in Him are crucial for both. And further it leaves the door open to the Jews to be grafted back in again.

**Wild olive tree** … Good picture of the Gentiles who had continued for uncounted generations in pagan debauchery, without the knowledge of God in any degree comparable to that of the Jew. Gentile culture lacked the noble instincts which enhanced that of the Jew; and Gentile nature has proved to be difficult and slow of transformation. Once a Jew accepts Christ, he much more easily understands the great spiritual truths of the gospel, such being the meaning of "**how much more**."

# **Conclusion**

Tension in the church between Jews the majority and Gentiles the minority. The minority was saying they are special because they were grafted into the tree of life and the majority was being cut off.

The whole of this study is simply saying, “Get over yourselves” You are saved by grace and grace alone. We all have one tree to which we receive our love and grace.  **“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power for salvation to the Jew first and then to the Greek.”**