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Class Notes

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Can Fallen Israel Be Recovered?

Romans 11:11-32

Romans 9-11: Paul is addressing the question of the Jewish nation, why is it that the overwhelming majority of Jews are rejecting Jesus as their Messiah?

Tracing out Paul's argument:

- It causes Paul tremendous sorrow and anguish (9:1-3)
- The Jews have tremendous spiritual advantages (9:4-5)
- It is not as though God's Word has failed! (9:6)
- Sovereign election: not all Israel are Israel (9:6-
 - God has chosen some, rejected the others
 - God's choice is sovereign, not based on works
 - Non-elect Jews are like Ishmael, Esau, and Pharaoh
 - God has mercy on the elect, hardens the rest
 - The only difference is God's sovereign will
 - God creates the reprobate to teach the elect his glories
- The elect are made up of both Jews and Gentiles (9:24-26)
- Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone (Christ) because they were trying to prove their own righteousness by the Law (9:27-33)
- Paul prays earnestly for the Jews, and seeks to evangelize them (10:1, 9-15)
- Two ways: the righteousness of the Law (self works) vs. the righteousness by faith (Christ's works) (10:5-8)
- Salvation is simple: believe that Jesus is Lord and confess him with your mouth, calling on his name (10:9-13)
- Evangelism to both Jews and Gentiles is essential (10:14-15)

- Sadly, most Jews who have heard have not believed; yet faith comes simply by hearing the Word of Christ (10:16-17)
- Excuses removed:
 - “They haven’t heard” ... Yes they have!
 - “They didn’t understand” ... That is no problem for God, because neither did the Gentiles who eventually believed
 - “They weren’t seeking Christ” ... neither were the Gentiles (10:18-20)
- Tragically: God has been patiently holding out his hands to the disobedient Jewish nation for centuries (10:21)
- God has not totally and finally rejected the Jewish nation (11:1-6)
 - Paul’s own conversion is proof...
 - God is doing what he has always done among the Jews, reserving a remnant who will believe in him
 - Like in Elijah’s day... a remnant chosen by grace, not works
- Summary: the elect are saved, the others are hardened (11:7-10)
 - This hardening is a spirit of stupor, blinded eyes, deaf ears
 - This hardening comes in part by their “table” (prosperity)

Can Fallen Israel Be Recovered? The Image of the Olive Tree (11:11-24)

Romans 11:11-24 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

¹³I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be

arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

The Main Question Posed... and Answered with Hope!

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Q: What is the main question Paul poses here about fallen Israel?

Q: What does Paul say is the purpose of Israel's "stumble" and "transgression" (rejection of Christ)?

Paul is citing the Song of Moses that he cited earlier in Romans 10:19:

Deuteronomy 32:21 They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.

Q: How does the success of the gospel among the Gentiles make Israel envious?

[Pisidian Antioch] Acts 13:44-49 *On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.*

Q: What hopeful statement does Paul make in verse 12? What riches does Paul refer to? What is their "fullness?"

Paul's Message to the Gentiles: Hope for Israel, Warning for Gentiles

Romans 11:13-16 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Q: Why does Paul specifically address Gentiles (Roman Christians) here? Why is it important for them to have the right attitude toward Israel?

Q: Why would Paul want to arouse his own people to envy?

Q: What hopeful things does Paul say about the rejection of the Jews and their future acceptance?

Q: How would the universal salvation of the Jews (at the end of the world) be like "life from the dead"?

Q: In what sense is Paul arguing that the Jews are "holy"?

Romans 11:17-21 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Q: Explain the image of the cultivate olive tree with a deep root system and various branches... natural and wild, stripped off and grafted in. What does all that refer to?

Q: How are Gentile Christians like wild olive shoots grafted into a cultivated olive tree? How do they derive nourishing sap from the root system?

Q: Why would it be very dangerous and arrogant for Gentile Christians to boast over the fallen branches (unbelieving Jews)?

Q: How does the image of the breaking off of cultivated olive branches so that wild branches could be grafted in give a picture of the actual history of the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles?

Q: What does "do not be arrogant but be afraid" mean? What healthy fear does Paul seek to stimulate among Gentile Christians?

Romans 11:22-24 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

Q: How is the “kindness and sternness” of God on display in all this?

Q: Why is it good to meditate on God as both the Father of the Prodigal Son and the consuming fire that descended on Sinai?

Q: What condition does Paul want Gentile Christians to meet going forward? Does this passage threaten the losing of salvation? How do we harmonize this with the security of the believer that Paul has taught so clearly in Romans 5:1-11 and Romans 8:28-39?

Q: What hope for the future does Paul give for individual unbelieving Jews here?

Q: Are some people easier to save than others? According to the logic of verse 24, who is easier to save – a “wild” Gentile or a “cultivated” Jew?

The Great Mystery of Israel’s Future Salvation

Romans 11:25-27 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Q: What mystery does Paul reveal here?

Q: What does he mean by “the full number of Gentiles” coming in?

Q: What does “And so, all Israel will be saved” mean?

Q: How do the promises cited here support this mystery?

Q: What is “godlessness”? How does this describe unbelieving Jews?

Q: How amazing would this final revival be? Why is it likely only to happen at the end of the world?