

Romans 11:16-36 –

The Lump, The Olive Tree, The Fullness of The Gentiles, and the Promise of the Salvation of Israel

When the Bible goes to illustrate a point, speculation often dominates the commentaries. We must remain in the context and remember that the illustration draws a picture of Paul's main point. The chapter begins and ends with the fact that God is not done with National, Ethnic Israel.

The chapter is an explanation of what is happening today — the setting aside of Israel and using a new entity to take on the responsibility. All the information must support this main point. The illustrations are used to make this point. Stretching pictures into ideas that do not take on the main point is one of the mistakes that interpreters make. This also happens with parables.

What is the lump? What is the first fruit of the lump? What is the olive tree? What is the root of the olive tree? And what is the fullness of the Gentiles? These questions are where the battle is fought; your understanding of these illustrations will determine your understanding of Israel and the Church.

Beginning in verse 16, this is literally translated, "Now if the first (is) holy; also the lump; and if the root (is) holy, also the branches."

1. First class condition – assumed to be true
 - a. We will see that first fruit and the branch are indeed holy
 - b. Appropriate to translate this "since"
2. Holy – "hagios" set apart/appropriate for service
 - a. Not justification
 - b. Not initial salvation
3. First fruit and root are synonymous
4. Lump and branches are synonymous
5. The lump and the branches do not support; they feed off
6. The lump and branches are not individual but a unit/group

First fruit is "**ἀπαρχή** *aparchē* (*ah-pahr-khay*)" which is literally the "first of." The word is used of the first believers of a region, of Jesus Christ, and the 144,000. The word is defended by its context. The context here is an illustration where the beginning of a lump of dough is implied (The word "lump" is always in context of bread).

Holy is "**ἅγιος** *hagios* (*hah-ghee-ahs*)" and means set apart. This can be positional with God; God makes you holy. Or this can refer to function, a task set aside for God's purpose. Therefore, this statement of the source being holy then indicates that the source has a dedicated appropriate function as appointed by God.

We all know of bread recipes that have starter kits and then after time you add ingredients and with the leftover portion you create more starter kits. Say it like this, “if the starter kit is good and appropriate for use so will the bread and the kit that comes from it.”

Reference Bibles have references to Nehemiah, Numbers, and Ezekiel to refer to the offering of first fruits. The texts in question never say that the meal offering that has been set apart (holy) makes all the bread holy. The texts indicate that Israel was to give of its firsts in order to have a blessing (Numbers 15:18-21).

The reference here does not say only when the first is holy then the whole is holy. What is commanded is that one makes a first of the portion offering. This does not correlate with Romans. Romans is not about sacrifice but illustrating that it is the source that provides the quality. Think back to starter dough.

Similarly, agriculturally speaking, the health of a tree is based upon the roots. As long as the root is good a tree can always be salvaged, just prune the bad/sick branches and let the tree re-sprout.

The point of the illustration is to show that the root or source is what has the inherent ability in it. This doesn't specify what the root or the first is at this time. The added ingredients to the starter lump or the branches to the root only function because of the source.

Notice that the lump analogy is gone after verse 16. This is because the next part of the illustration does not fit well with bread or dough. Once dough is mixed you cannot separate the ingredients again. Therefore, only the roots/branches illustration is used.

The conclusion then is that verse 16 is only speaking of source teaching. This lesson will be directly applied later in the passage as warning to the readers to not become proud because branches can be replaced; “the grafting in” is a privilege not a right. So, the lump illustration is only to point out that the source has the power.

Now the question, what do the sources represent and what is addition? The simplest response, typically, is that the root is God or Jesus, but that would mean that some were part of the Christ but were then broken off and others took the place. Some say it is the patriarchs (Abraham, Moses, prophets), but that would mean that those grafted in would be temporary Israel. This does not fit either.

Neither of these positions supports the point that Israel is not rejected, that National, Ethnic Israel will be fully restored, and that God's promises will be completely fulfilled.

The better answer contextually is that of the administration of God. In the Old Testament, Israel was chosen to be the bearers of the light to all the nations. They were the nation that God used to care for the revelation of God. Now, the nation of Israel is set aside and the “church” is being used as a modified Jew/Gentile entity.

1. This is not about individuals
2. This is about group identification
3. Israel as a nation is set aside
4. Individual Jews can still be used under the banner of the church

The administration/plan of God is holy and is appropriate to function. Those who are a part of the administration are also set apart as a group for service.

Now that we know the context and the meaning of these illustrations, the rest of the illustration is easier.

Verse 17 begins with another 1st class conditional phrase, so once again this can be translated, “since some of the branches were broken off...” The word “some” is part of the verse and is literal. We have already discussed that there is a portion of Israel that are believers, therefore a part of Israel was broken off but some remained attached.

In the past, Israel was used despite their sin, rebellion, and disbelief. The tool within National Israel to bring about the truths of God was often the believers among them, but all of Israel was part of the administration of God to the world.

1. No other nation was used to bring God’s truth.
2. Judgement was swifter and stricter on unbelieving Israel.
3. Even after the perpetual breaking of the covenant, the Messiah still came from Israel.

After making the truth statement “since the branches were broken off,” Paul makes the statement that the Gentiles are a wild olive tree that was grafted in. The word “wild olive tree” and “was grafted in” are used exclusively in Romans 11. The next observation is that the term for olive tree (11:17, 24) is not used in the New Testament except in Revelation 11:1-7. Here, the two witnesses are two olive trees. The trees are used as an illustration that is explained as ones that have a function, a ministry to tell of the glories of God to the world and the Beast. In my research, I cannot make any other connection and the one in Revelation is ambiguous at best and possibly not related.

The use of the olive tree here seems to be for illustration only, as grafting olive trees together in the Mediterranean was common and served as a perfect picture to demonstrate that Gentile believers and Jewish

believers are now, for a time, part of the same “tree.” They have been brought together to demonstrate God’s use of a new entity for the time that National Israel is set aside.

As we continue in Romans 11, we see this illustration becoming clearer as we narrow our understanding. The words “you...have become a partaker in the fatness of the olive tree” becomes simple to understand.

Verses 18-25 (Read 16-36) is the point of the allegory. The point is the Gentiles are warned not to become arrogant as if Gentiles are better than Israel. The fact is that National Israel failed as a nation due to unbelief but Gentiles (not national but general) are given the opportunity to fill in for them while they are disciplined.

Let’s take a look at a few key words in this passage.

Verse 18 – “be arrogant” is a verb, “**κατακαυχάομαι** *katakauchaomai* (*kah-tah-kau-khah-ah-my*),” and means to exult against, glory over, gloating over a defeated foe. The verse states “do not exult against the branches.”

The verse continues to explain that it is not because that the branches are not anything of themselves but are supported by the roots, not the other way around.

Verse 19 seems to be a slight rebuttal. They were broken off with the purpose that “I might be grafted in.” The typical human response in reviewing God’s use of a person, or in this case an entity, is to look at the merits of the individual. God chooses whom He will choose for His own glory not according to works but based solely on grace (Romans 11:5-6). God uses us but not because of our merits, and if we fail (and we are failing) we will be replaced with the natural branches (which will happen).

Verse 20 – Paul clarifies the point that they were broken off due to their unbelief. Then in the next phrase Paul contrasts the thought with “you stand by your faith.”

“You have stood” is “**ἵστημι** *histēmi* (*hīh’-stay-me*)” and is defined as “stand firm, establish, set, or confirm.” The grammatical form is Perfect Active Indicative. The contrast in this verse is that Nation Israel has disbelieved but you have stood.

Faith is modified in the Greek not by “your” but by the definite article “the.” This should be translated, “But you have stood by the faith”

“You have stood by the faith” — the contrast becomes clearer in that the grafted-in Gentiles were given the opportunity on account of the fact that they (we) have been established in the doctrines of Jesus Christ. This is not an imperative to stand firm but a recognition of their position.

The imperatives come after: “do not be conceited” and “fear.” The word for conceited is actually “high minded,” combining an adjective for “high” and a verb for “thinking.” The use of this word (or combination) indicates that the person thinks too highly of himself or of things; misplaced (Rom 12:16; 1Tim 6:17).

Fear should always be first understood as respect. God is absolute holiness and justice. If God would hold us to His standard, what would happen to us? By the grace that He has chosen to demonstrate do we serve.

The “Encouraging Warning” is found in verses 21-22. The commands to “not be conceited but fear” should be joined to verses 21-22. Verse 21 is in response to the arrogant mental attitude toward the Jews whom God has purposed and who will come to fruition.

Verse 22 draws two distinctions of God’s character, generosity and harshness.

Some of the biggest misconceptions about God are often formed when they do not consider the full nature of God. They only evaluate God based upon love, grace, and mercy. But the grace of God cannot be understood without first understanding His perfection, justice, and judgment.

The severity of God is displayed upon the fallen ones; God’s choosing of Israel has often been used as a lesson in the righteousness of God and the judgment of God against those who are obstinate (1Cor 10:1-12).

Kindness is “**χρηστότης** *chrēstotēs (khray-**stah**’-tayce)*” and is a word that means “goodness, uprightness, or generosity.” The generosity of God is demonstrated to Gentile believers as long they continue in that generosity. When (not if) the Gentiles fail, they will be cut off as well.

1. This is not a picture of salvation but service.
2. I am speaking of the Gentiles in the third person because we need to ensure this is not an individual warning, but a warning to an entity.
3. There is individual response, but this is corporate responsibility.
4. Paul is detached because he is an Israelite; as a believing Jew, this warning is not for him.

Verses 23-24 reiterate the opportunity for Israel if they believe. The use of Gentiles in the tree does not negate nor eliminate the use of Israel. God can easily re-graft in the natural branches.

Recap:

1. Israel is Set Aside.
2. The Believing Remnant of Israel Has Remained.
3. Gentile Believers Have Been Joined to the Believing Remnant.
4. Our Use in God’s Administration is a Mercy/Generosity of God.
5. Our Use Has Nothing to Do With Our Abilities or Being Special
6. We Must Not Be Conceited Against Israel

Romans 11:25-27 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Beginning in verse 25, we are still dealing with the admonishment to the Gentile portion of the churches. Paul is going to give another reason why they should not exalt themselves over the unbelieving Jews. This is what needs to be emphasized in this lesson. God is not done with Israel, therefore we believers must not think of ourselves as being better than they. We must carry on the mental attitude of God and of Paul.

As far as that being the overall lesson in this section, few who understand dispensations would disagree. But there are many discussions as to what verse 25 indicates. This first lesson this morning will focus on what verse 25 means. Because we all pretty much agree that the primary lesson is to not have a negative attitude against Israel, I will present this verse as to what I am persuaded it means and why.

The verse begins with a revelation of a mystery. "**μυστήριον** *mustērion* (*moo-**stay**'-ree-ahn*)" is a word that is used frequently. The definition is a secret, something that before the revelation **had been** a secret. The term "mystery" is never used as information that would never be revealed, but rather it is information that God had not yet revealed (or is not widely known) in the Hebrew Scriptures. Some have opined that the biggest mystery in the New Testament is the mystery of the "*ekklesia*."

1st Corinthians 2:3-11 – Our doctrines that we believe are not man's thoughts but revelation from God. The wisdom of God had been previously revealed but has been lost to the rulers of this world. They should have known this wisdom — it is found all over the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. The mystery here is defined in the fact that they did not know the information even though they should have. This information is not of man; man has not seen, has not heard, or has not thought of God's plan for believers. Therefore, the mystery here is something that is not man conceived. It is information too profound for human ingenuity or imagination.

The most frequently used cross-reference is in Ephesians. Unlike Romans which only uses it here and in 16:25, Paul uses it six times in the letter to the Ephesians. 1:9-10 – The mystery of the will of God is that everything will be headed up by Christ. 3:3-6 – Gentiles were made co-heirs, co-members, and co-partakers of the promise through Jesus Christ. 6:19 – The mystery of the Gospel – This is not about the church but about the offer of reconciliation to God and the opportunity to partake in the administration of

God and the eternal glory waiting those who believe in Him. This is information that is not widely known but should be.

So, mystery can refer to many things, the mystery of the church is one of them, but we cannot automatically infer that the mystery in Romans 11:25 refers to the church. The context must dictate to what the mystery is referring.

This is the exegetical mistake that some have made. They see the word mystery and their first thought is “church,” so the automatic interpretation is that the fullness of the Gentiles means “when the entire harvest of the Gentiles comes into the church.”

First, let us define what the mystery is in this verse. The mystery is “that a hardness in part has happened to Israel.” The next phrase is an addition, “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” The indication of the mystery is that of a partial hardening and a culmination.

Hardness is “**πώρωσις** *pōrōsis* (**roh’-roh-sis**)” and means to make as a stone, deadened senses. The verb for “has happened” is “**γίνομαι** *ginomai*” which is not a state of being but indicates that “it (Israel) has become hard.” The question always surfaces —Did God harden Israel or did Israel harden itself? The answer is “yes” but is actually irrelevant. This is not presented as a discussion point in the passage, the point is the current state of Israel is that it has become hard.

Notice that I am constantly referring to Israel as a singular “it” not “they.” This is because, as an individual, a Jew can come into the church. But Israel as a nation is not currently being used for the revealing of the glory of God. This hardening, then, is not a belief/unbelief but rather is referring to the purpose of Israel. Israel is not permitted nor do they permit themselves to be used in the administration of God.

Now comes the discussion of “the fullness of the Gentiles.” Notice again that the discipline is up to this point. The word of for fullness is “**πλήρωμα** *plērōma* (**play’-roh-mah**)” and is the noun form of the verb “**πληρώω** *plēroō* (**play-rah’-oh**)” meaning that which fills, fullness, totality, completed nature, fulfillment. The fullness here is often understood as “full number,” but is that definition justified? This word is used three other times in Romans (11:12; 13:10; 15:29). None of these references indicates a “full number” or “all who would.” None of the New Testament references refers to a full number (1Cor 10:26; Eph 4:13; Col 2:9).

The verb “**πληρώω** *plēroō*” is used primarily in the Gospels as prophecy being fulfilled. In Pauline literature, it is used as a completeness of will or purpose.

Therefore, the idea that the timing of the fullness of the Gentiles is when the last Gentile believes in Jesus is reading into the passage. The context helps us understand what this is.

When the “fullness of the Gentiles comes in” then all Israel will be saved. Paul then immediately promotes the New Covenant. The New Covenant does not happen at the rapture of the church. It happens in the inauguration of the Millennial Reign. Therefore, this fullness of the Gentiles cannot be referring to the church because we would have been gone for some time; this must be referring to something during the Tribulation.

The word for Gentiles is “**ἔθνος** *ethnos* (*ethh'-nahs*)” which means ethnic, nation. A search of this word and the word fullness with all of its cognates leads to only one New Testament reference (Luke 21:10-28). Here in vs. 24, it is the verb — “until times of nations should be fulfilled.”

The context of both Romans 11:25-27 and Luke 21:10-28 concerns the end times and the return of Jesus to save Israel (or what is left). The context dictates not a fullness of nations come into the church but rather the completion of the Gentiles as part of the prophecy of God against and for Israel as a nation.

Next hour we will deal with these events to demonstrate what will happen immediately before the Second Coming of Messiah.

Romans 11:25-27 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Last lesson, we dealt with what the “fullness of the Gentiles indicated.” Our conclusion was that it was referring to the completion of the use of the nations against Israel and Jerusalem. Once the nations’ purpose is complete, then Jesus will come again and all Israel will be restored.

Although God is using nations as a discipline against Israel, it does not negate the sin of the nations. God waiting for sin to become full or complete is not without its precedence (Genesis 15:13-21).

Even from the beginning of Israel, a final restoration and the judgment of the nations who are against Israel has been promised (Deuteronomy 30:1-3, 7).

According to Psalm 83, the surrounding nations have/will continue to push against Israel with the purpose of wiping Israel off the map. They desire the complete and utter destruction of Israel. The writer prays that YHWH will wipe them out. Most see this psalm as an end-times prophetic psalm. The point of this lesson is that the surrounding nations are a constant pressure against Israel. There will be a day when God will defeat them so that His name will be known and glorified.

In Ezekiel 38-39, God speaks to the “Son of Man” identifying the end-times war against Israel. It speaks of Gog and Magog, Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Persia (Iraq/Iran), Ethiopia (Modern Day Sudan), Put (Lybia), Gomer and Beth-Togarmar (Turkey?). In verses 10-16, Ezekiel prophesies that they will all come against Israel to destroy and plunder and this is to demonstrate the power of God against the nations.

In the end, Israel will be restored and the nations will be defeated (Ezekiel 39:21-29).

In Daniel 8, Gabriel provides an interpretation of the vision of 8:1-14. In Daniel 8:19-22, the interpretation provides names and occurrences: Media, Persia, Greece, and four other kingdoms. Then in Daniel 9:27, the prince who will come and make a treaty with Israel will inaugurate the abomination of desolation.

This situation happens in the middle of Daniel’s 70th week (the middle of the Tribulation). This takes us to Matthew 24:15-21 — the Great Tribulation will be a time of man against man and God’s wrath fully on display.

Then finally, we move to Revelation 8 and 9 with the trumpet judgments on account of the abomination of desolation. God destroys over one half of the world's population. Then, in the sixth trumpet, another 200 million-man army will march from the East to war with Israel.

So now we have a necessary recap:

1. Prophecy of nations being used as a discipline against Israel in Deuteronomy
2. The neighboring nations in Psalm 83 are a constant pressure against Israel
3. The nations to the north, enemy nations in Africa, and Iraq and Iran all war against Israel
4. The pseudo world-leader makes a treaty only to try to overthrow Israel by claiming he is God
5. This initiates a wrath upon Israel and world
6. Then 200 million march on Israel from the East

Now we come to the final battle as the rest of the nations, the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Dragon meet in Armageddon to war against Israel. Revelation 19:11-21 – But now Jesus comes to the rescue to deliver Israel from the hand of all its enemies. The fullness of the nations is complete.

Now we have peace. In Romans 11:26-27, all Israel will be restored. This is a national salvation and the New Covenant will be established. We see a quote of Isaiah 59:15-21 and a clear reference to the destruction of the enemies and the New Covenant established with Israel. The New Covenant was cut at the cross, is inaugurated but it has not yet been fully established.

It is important to remember that the New Covenant is not a promise of the removal of sins in general. We have as a side benefit the forgiveness of sins individually (not nationally). The sins that are forgiven in the New Covenant are not individual sins but that of the Nation of Israel.

What sins? The sin of rejection of Messiah (initially and perpetually) and the sin of idolatry when they fall into worship of the Prince (the Beast, The Dragon, The False Prophet) claiming that this is their messiah.

The believing remnant, those who do not believe in the un-holy trinity, flee after the abomination of desolation and they survive (the last of Israel) and then call upon Jesus to save them from assured destruction and to full restoration. Jesus will forgive the national sins and all of Israel will be saved.

As another reminder, let us review the eight provisions of the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34

1. Unconditional — involving God and a unified Israel
 - a. House of Judah
 - b. House of Israel
2. This is distinct from the Old Covenant
 - a. Not an elaboration
 - b. Not a repair, but a repeal/replace
3. Regeneration of Israel (Isaiah 59:21)
 - a. This refers to a spiritually saved Israel
 - b. Includes a national salvation as well
4. No need to evangelize their offspring or fellow Jews (Isaiah 61:8-9)
 - a. During the Millennial Reign, no Jew will be unsaved.
 - b. The rebellion at the end of the thousand years will not involve Israel
 - c. The New Covenant will take away their sins
5. Forgiveness of sin
 - a. The Old Covenant was unable to take away sin
 - b. This is a full and complete forgiveness of the current rebellion and setting aside
6. My Law on their hearts
 - a. No need to teach each other
 - b. God will be personally involved with each person of Israel
7. Full blessings of the Earth (Jeremiah 32:38-42; Isaiah 61:8-9; Ezekiel 34:25-27)
 - a. Not based upon obedience
 - b. Unconditional
8. The temple will be rebuilt (Ezekiel 37:24-28)