

## Chapter 52

### Does Israel Have a Future?

(Romans 11:11–16)

Now Paul comes to his fourth observation upon the plight of Israel. Israel's spiritual collapse is not permanent! He begins with a question: <sup>11</sup>*Again I ask: did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?* The answer is: *Not at all.* There is no reason to think Israel has fallen down so badly that they will never again be blessed spiritually at a nationwide level.

**Israel's rejection of Christ was used by God.** Paul says: *On the contrary, through their trespass salvation has come to the gentiles in order to make the people of Israel jealous.* God let the people of Israel fall into 'trespass'. Yet the trespass of Israel – their tragic rejection of Jesus – actually hastened the coming of salvation to gentiles. On one occasion Paul said, 'Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the gentiles' (Acts 13:46). The preachers of the gospel began concentrating on reaching the gentile population. The reaching of the gentiles was stimulated and prompted by Israel's rejection of it. Paul works in the hope of Israel's becoming spiritually jealous – and so should we. There is the possibility that eventually Israel will want what they see the gentiles enjoying.

**The conversion of Israel would lead to immense blessing.** <sup>12</sup>*But if their transgression means riches for the world and their loss means riches for the gentiles, how much greater riches will their*

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*fullness bring.* If the day when Israel rejected Jesus brought worldwide blessing, what sort of worldwide blessing might we expect if Israel were ever to receive Jesus at a national level? Paul anticipates that Israel might be made jealous through the salvation of gentiles. Paul raises the possibility that there might be a spiritual ‘jealousy’ which turns out to be beneficial to Israel – and that would lead to greater blessings for the entire world.

In verses 13–14 Paul turns aside and speaks of what this means for his own ministry. He ministers to gentiles but hopes his own people will eventually profit from what he is doing. Then in verse 15 he restates what he said in verse 12 and continues from where he left off.

<sup>13</sup>*Now I am speaking to you gentiles. Therefore, in so far as I am apostle to the gentiles I make much of my ministry* <sup>14</sup>*in the hope that in some way I might stimulate my own people to ‘jealousy’ and so save some of them.* Paul was a man who knew that he was specially called to ‘cross-cultural’ ministry. Yet he was deeply Jewish and when the gospel went to degraded gentiles Paul had hopes that eventually his own more respectable, law-loving fellow-Jews would come in as well.

Verse 15 repeats and clarifies 11:12. <sup>15</sup>*For if their rejection is the reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance be, except life from the dead?* As before his point is: if a tragedy leads to blessing, surely a blessing will lead to something even greater still! As a nation Israel has stumbled (11:11), has committed ‘trespass’ (11:11), has experienced ‘loss’ (11:12) and has suffered ‘rejection’ by God (11:15). Yet this calamity brought blessing; it accelerated the preaching of the gospel to gentiles. It brought ‘salvation’ (11:11), ‘riches’ (11:12), ‘reconciliation’ (11:15). God is working out a plan. ‘Reconciliation’ in this place means the preaching of the message of reconciliation to gentiles everywhere so that all gentile nations are reached with God’s message of peace with himself. ‘Reconciliation for the world’ in verse 15 is the same as ‘riches for the gentiles’ in verse 12. When the day

comes when the same people who were rejected by God – the nation of Israel as a whole – are received back by God into his kingdom, what a staggering blessing it will bring. Paul calls it ‘life from the dead’! It is advance for the church of Jesus Christ that is vastly greater than anything the world has yet ever seen. Words fail us in describing this destiny of the church. In the seventeenth century English-speaking Christians called it the ‘latter-day glory’ of the church. ‘Life from the dead’ almost certainly refers to worldwide revival and spiritual triumph.

**There are reasons to expect Israel’s conversion.** Paul takes a step forward in his argument. *16Now if the first part is holy so also is the lump, and if the root is holy so also are the branches.* In 11:11–15 he had simply raised the **possibility** of Israel’s coming to salvation. He had been saying ‘If . . .’. Now he gives reasons why it is quite **probable** Israel would be saved, since God had given great promises to the patriarchs. Paul uses two illustrations: the ‘firstfruits and the lump’, and the ‘root and the branches’. In the offering of the firstfruits of Israel’s harvest, the presentation of the first part of the crop was the sign that the entire harvest belonged to God; it had been given because of the goodness of God. The ‘firstfruits’ are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ancestors of the nation. The first people to be given promises were people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The patriarchs have a ‘preserving’ effect on the whole nation of Israel.

Paul’s second illustration is that of an olive tree. The ‘root’ of the second illustration refers to Abraham or to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The point does not focus on the **physical** descent itself; it rather focuses on **promises**. Grace cannot be physically inherited. Of course not! But there were certain **promises** given to Abraham that those who descended from him would eventually be blessed. This required that one day the entire people of Abraham would have to be brought to faith and brought back into the kingdom of God. If the first part (Abraham) was

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special to God, so was the entire nation because of the promises given to Abraham.

Paul is developing a surprising line of argument here. The Jews have rejected Jesus and yet Paul is arguing that they are in some sense 'holy'! It is surprising that people can be Christ-rejecters and yet 'holy' at the same time, but this is the very thing he is saying (and it resembles a conclusion that is coming up later in 11:28).

God took hold of the patriarchs, saved them, and told them that through the nation coming into being from them, he would bring worldwide salvation. He told them, in effect, that they were just a first instalment and that a whole nation of people like them would come into being.

So the whole nation of Israel is 'holy'. This does not mean 'holy' in the sense of 'sanctified as saved individuals'. It means 'set apart by God because of the special purpose for them that he has in his mind'. The entire nation of Israel is 'holy' not because each Jew is experiencing salvation but because the nation is under God's special care as he plans to fulfil the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.