

## Chapter 54

### The Restoration of Israel

(Romans 11:23–27)

Paul's argument has been steadily intensifying.

1. He raised the question of how permanent was Israel's stumbling and said it did not have to be permanent (11:11a).

2. The rejection of Israel was leading to blessing and could lead to even greater blessing (11:11b–12). His own ministry kept that possibility in view (11:13–15).

3. He gave two illustrations implying the 'holiness' of Israel (11:16a, 16b), and then he used the second of his illustrations to give the gentile Christians at Rome a severe warning (11:17–22).

4. Now he speaks of the ability of God to restore. <sup>23</sup>*And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.* It is not nationality that will lead to Israel's restoration. Nor is it the sight of Jesus at the second coming (which would not involve faith!). Israel's restoration is connected to faith – at some stage in the gospel age.

5. Romans 11:24 makes the point that Israel's restoration is easily done. It is easier for God to restore Jews than it was to save gentiles. *For if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature and against what is natural you have been implanted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will those who are the natural branches be implanted back into their own olive tree?* The more difficult thing was saving the gentiles. The gentiles were

entirely outside God's plan and purpose. They had fallen into extreme vileness and wickedness. It was 'contrary' to nature to put gentiles into the children of Abraham, just as it was unusual to put a wild olive shoot into a cultivated tree! So to restore Israel back into its own tree would be the easier task! They had already been given so much of the promises of God.

6. In Romans 11:26 Paul makes a direct, apostolic, inspired, dogmatic statement. He has so far been simply arguing and building up a case. It is good to reason and reflect. There are good reasons for believing in the restoration of Israel, and it is good that they should know what they are. But now he abandons argument and turns to prediction (11:25–26a), confirming it with Scripture (11:26b–27), showing how it fits with God's plan (11:28–29) and God's impartiality (11:30–32).

*<sup>25</sup>For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be wise in your own self-estimation. A hardening for a while has come upon Israel until the time when the full number of the gentiles comes in, <sup>26</sup>and in this way all Israel shall be saved.*

A 'mystery' is something that can only be known by revelation. It is not a 'secret', but it is something that would be a secret if God had not revealed it! 'A hardening for a time has come upon Israel . . .' I translate a Greek phrase (*apo merous*) with the words 'for a time'. It cannot mean 'in part'. Paul is not speaking about 'parts' of Israel. Nor can Paul mean that Israel has been 'partly' hardened. He has not been saying that either. The phrase refers to time, as in Romans 15:23–24 where the rsv translates 'for a while'. The hardening that has come upon Israel will continue 'for a while . . . until the time when the full number of the gentiles comes in'. Paul takes it for granted that a large number of gentiles will be saved. 'Fullness' (as some translate it) has the sense of a large number. Evidently Paul is expecting a large measure of success in the work of reaching the gentiles. It has the same meaning as in verse 12; it means a very large

number of gentiles in many gentile nations. ‘And so . . . ’ means ‘and in the way described’. Israel’s restoration will come by means of gentile evangelism which eventually blesses Israel (as 11:11, 14 has suggested). Large numbers of gentile Christians attract the attention and even the jealousy of Israel, and lead to their conversion. Eventually the nation as a whole will turn to Jesus Christ and large numbers of Jews will be saved. Not every Jew will be saved; but the nation as a whole at that time will turn to Jesus.

The point is often emphasized that Paul says ‘and so’ or ‘and in this way’. He does not say ‘and then’. There certainly is a time-element in it because Paul is referring to time. True, the phrase refers to God’s method more than to God’s time. But time comes into it because the method is that, when the fullness of gentiles comes in, the Jews will be aroused to follow and obtain what they see in large numbers of gentile Christians. ‘And so’ refers to method – but the method implies a time! All Israel will be saved. Obviously the ‘salvation’ includes such things as forgiveness. Paul refers to ‘removing ungodliness’ and the forgiveness of sins (11:26). The way of salvation for Jews, like that for anyone else, is by faith in Jesus (as Paul implied in 11:23). ‘Saved’ refers to Christian salvation identical to that which is experienced by gentile Christians. There is no difference between Jew and Greek in this respect – as 10:12 told us. One day the nations will be reached for Jesus – including the nation of Israel! The Old Testament predicted it.

*As it is written,*

*‘The Deliverer will come from Zion.  
He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.  
<sup>27</sup> And this is my covenant with them,  
when I take away their sins.’*