

ROMANS 11



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It was the prophet Isaiah then, after Moses, not Paul, who had distinctly pronounced Israel a rebellious people, spite of God's daily pleading with them, and the call of the Gentiles who had not sought it. It was in vain to quarrel with the gospel on this score. The question is raised consequently whether Israel was wholly to lose their position in God's favour according to promise. The apostle proves the contrary in this chapter.

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? Far be it! For I also am an Israelite, of Abraham's seed, of Benjamin's tribe. God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Know ye not what the scripture saith in [the section of] Elias, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have dug down thine altars; and I only am left, and they seek my life?' But what saith the divine answer to him? 'I have left to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'* Thus then in the present time also there has been a remnant according to election of grace; but if by grace, no longer of works, otherwise grace becomes no longer grace [; but if of

works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work†]. What then? That which Israel seeks for he did not obtain, but the election obtained, and the rest were hardened; even as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupefaction, eyes not to see and ears not to hear unto this day.' And David saith, 'Let their table be for a snare, and for a trap, and for a stumbling-block, and for a recompense to them; let their eyes be darkened not to see, and bow down their back alway.'" (Ver. 1-10.)

{* In the LXX, as the text at present stands, the masculine article is prefixed, not as here the feminine; but it may originally have been otherwise as elsewhere. ([Judges 2:13](#); [Hosea 2:8](#); [Zeph. 1:4](#).) The quotation is the sense, not the precise transcript of either the Heb. or the LXX. Abarbanel speaks of a male image for men, a female for women; but this scarcely accounts for the case before us. Others (as Authorized Version) suppose an ellipse of εικόνη.

† The Vatican, which is the best support of this doubtful clause, reads χάρις, grace.}

This is the first answer to the question of Israel's total and final rejection. God foreknew* His people when He chose and called them; and, knowing all their evil beforehand, He certainly will not cast them off. He has not done so, as Paul's own case proved; for he was no bad instance – he who had shared in the nation's guiltiest prejudices and bitterest unbelief and rejection of Jesus; yet had God called him. His love lingered over His poor unworthy people even now, as Paul was also a pattern for them who should hereafter believe on Christ Jesus to eternal life. On him first was the Lord showing the whole of His longsuffering: yet was he also an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, the one recalling the ancient promises, the other subsequent sin, himself withal present electing mercy, a pledge of the future grace which would save the people fully. Were the exclusion absolute, Paul certainly could not have been brought into His favour.

But there is further proof still. **"Know ye not what the scripture saith" in the account of Elijah?** The disheartened prophet saw himself alone faithful in that dark page of Israel's history – himself therefore the object of hatred unto death as far as king and people could. But the divine admonition let him know of a complete remnant, **"seven thousand, such**

as bowed not the knee to Baal." Thus then in the present time also there has been a remnant "according to election of grace." It was electing grace now as then. The general state was at that time undeniably apostate: what was it in Paul's day?

{* It is a mistake to call this an election before the world's foundation which is only said of Christians, of the church. Israel were chosen in time.}

This gives the apostle the occasion, never let slip by the Holy Spirit, of asserting grace in its exclusion of works – in their mutual exclusion, if we accept the received reading. But I do not see that the bracketed clause adds to the precision of the truth; whereas it was natural enough to tack it on, especially as the form in the Vatican copy seems in evident error (χάρις instead of ἔργον in the end of the disputed clause).

How then stands the case? **"What Israel seeks, this it obtained not, but the election obtained; and the rest were hardened."** It will be noticed that those we call ordinarily the remnant or righteous portion of Israel are designated "the election," while the mass are called the rest or remnant. "Hardened" also is the right sense, rather than blinded (though this is also taught elsewhere). It may be that ἐπωρώθησαν was confounded in thought and sense with ἐπηρώθησαν, as another has pointed out to be the fact in the Vatican text of [Job 17:7](#) in the LXX.

This leads the apostle to adduce the testimony of scripture, in the words (apparently mingled) of [Isaiah 29:10](#) and [Deuteronomy 29:4](#), followed up by the still more tremendous imprecation of David in [Psalm 69:22-23](#), all speaking of the ungodly in Israel. Here again the law, the psalms, and the prophets gave their joint overwhelming evidence in terms so vehement that the apostle had rather to bring in "strong consolation" from the unfailing faithfulness of God for at least a remnant as we have seen, before he established every word by these "two or three witnesses" for the general condition of Israel. What more apt to clench the question? What wiser course possible for the apostle?

But let me refer to Calvin's comment on these quotations; for, able as he was, pious too and grave in general, his narrow system exposed him here

to adventure remarks on the apostle no less unworthy than presumptuous.

*"Quae adducit testimonia, quanquam ex variis potius scripturae locis collecta, quam ex uno loco desumpta sunt, omnia tamen videntur aliena esse ab ejus proposito, si ex circumstanciis suis ea propius expendas. Ubique enim videas excaecationem et indurationem commemorari, tanquam Dei flagella, quibus jam admissa ab impiis flagitia ulciscitur: Paulus autem probare hic contendit, excaecari non eos, qui sua malitia jam id meriti sint, sed qui ante mundi creationem reprobati sunt a Deo. (?) Hunc nodum ita breviter solvas, Quod origo impietatis, quae ita in se provocat Dei furorem, est perversitas naturae a Deo derelictae. Quare non abs re Paulus de aeterna reprobatione (?) haec citavit, quae ex ea prodeunt ut fructus ex arbore, et rivus a scaturigine. Impii quidem propter sua scelera justo Dei judicio caecitate puniuntur: sed si fontem exitii eorum quaerimus, eo deveniendum erit, quod a Deo maledicti, nihil omnibus factis, dictis, consiliis suis, quam maledictionem accersere et accumulare possunt. Imo aeternae reprobationis ita abscondita est causa, ut nihil aliud nobis supersit, quam admirari incomprehensibile Dei consilium sicuti tandem ex clausula patebit. Stulte autem faciunt, qui simulac verbum factum est de propinquis causis, earum praetextu hanc primam, quae sensum nostrum latet, obtegere tentant: acsi Deus non libere ante Adae lapsum statuisset de toto humano genere quod visum est, quia damnat vitiosum ac pravum ejus semen: deinde quia peculiariter singulis quam meriti sunt scelerum mercedem rependit."**
(Calv. in loc. i. 149, ed. Tholuck, Halae, 1831.)

{* "The quotations which he adduces, collected from various parts of scripture, and not taken from one passage, do seem, all of them, to be foreign to his purpose, when you closely examine them according to their contexts; for you will find that in every passage, blindness and hardening are mentioned as scourges, by which God punished crimes already committed by the ungodly; but Paul labours to prove here, that not those were blinded who so deserved by their wickedness, but who were rejected by God before the foundation of the world." [Paul really does nothing less.]}

"You may thus briefly untie this knot – that the origin of the impiety which provokes God's displeasure is the perversity of nature when

forsaken by God. Paul therefore, while speaking of eternal reprobation, has not without reason referred to those things which proceed from it, as fruit from the tree or river from the fountain. The ungodly are indeed for their sins visited by God's judgment with the blindness; but if we seek for the source of their ruin, we must come to this, – that being accursed by God they cannot by all their deeds, sayings, and purposes, get and obtain anything but a curse. Yet the cause of eternal reprobation is so hidden from us, that nothing remains for us but to wonder at the incomprehensible purpose of God, as we shall at length see by the conclusion.

But they reason absurdly who, whenever a word is said of the proximate causes, strive, by bringing forward these, to cover the first, which is hid from our view; as though God had not, before the fall of Adam, freely determined to do what seemed good to him with respect to the whole human race on this account, – because he condemns his corrupt and depraved seed, and also because he repays to individuals the reward which their sins have deserved." I purposely cite from the Calvin Transl. series, Comm. on Rom., p. 417. Edinb. 1849.

One could understand a believer perhaps saying that the citations of an apostle seemed foreign to his purpose when not examined with their context; but is it too much if we denounce as irreverent no less than unintelligent the man who could venture so to speak, for no better reason than a blind love of his own scheme? It is excellent and right that scripture should declare hardening to be an infliction of God after men have already proved their ungodliness. It is false and bad to say that Paul labours to prove here that the blinding was not because it was deserved but in consequence of eternal reprobation.

In fact scripture teaches no such doctrine. Nowhere are any said to be rejected before the foundation of the world. Nor this only: they are punished at the world's end for their wickedness, not because of a divine decree. Indeed a judgment in this case would be nugatory. But they are judged each according to their works, and the lake of fire is their sentence; though scripture takes care after this to append the divine side, adding that, if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. So in a previous chapter of this epistle Paul had carefully shown how God, willing to show His wrath and make His power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted for

destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He had before prepared for glory.

To me I confess it looks like the blinding influence of falsehood when men overlook the difference of vessels of wrath fitted on the one hand to destruction, and of vessels of mercy which He on the other hand before made ready for glory. It is guilty man who is the agent in sin and misery; God only who is the source of all the good, though His longsuffering be conspicuous most of all if possible in bearing with the evil who at last come into judgment.

In short then not only not Paul but no other inspired writer ever speaks of "eternal reprobation;" it is merely a dream of a certain school. So the curse of God follows, instead of causing, the impious ways of men. Arminianism is wholly astray no doubt in reducing God's election to a mere foresight of good in some creatures; but Calvinism is no less erroneous in imputing the evil lot of the first Adam race to God's decree. They both spring from analogous roots of unbelief: Calvinism reasoning, contrary to scripture, from the truth of election to the error of eternal reprobation; Arminianism rightly rejecting that reprobation but wrongly reasoning against election. Like other systems they are in part true and in part false – true in what they believe of scripture, false in yielding to human thoughts outside scripture: happy those, who are content as Christians with the truth of God and refuse to be partisans on either side of men! Our wisdom is to have our minds open to all scripture, refusing to go a hair-breadth farther.

The next position of the apostle is, in great part, decided by the question: **"I say then, Did they stumble in order that they should fall? Far be it: but by their trespass salvation [is come] to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy. But if their trespass be [the] world's riches and their loss [the] Gentiles' riches, how much more their fulness? Now* I speak to you, the Gentiles; inasmuch therefore as I am apostle of Gentiles I glorify my ministry, if by any means I shall provoke to jealousy my flesh and save some of them. For if their rejection [be the] world's reconciliation, what the reception but life from [the] dead?"** (Ver. 11-15.)

{* δέ "but," "now," is the reading of Ἄ B and other good authorities, instead of the more common and easy γάρ, "for." The difference in sense seems slight.}

Thus the very slip of Israel from its place of witness and depository of promise, turned as it is through divine mercy into present favour towards the Gentile world, becomes an argument in the hands of grace to assure their future restoration. The apostle alludes to the words of [Deuteronomy 32](#), the bearing of which on the question is as evident as to the Jew their authority is indisputable. It was not Paul but Moses who declared that the Jew provoked Jehovah to jealousy, that he was unmindful of the Rock who begat him, the glory of God that formed him. It was Moses who testified that Jehovah said, "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with [that which is] not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with [those which are] not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

Undoubtedly it is the sure and solemn threat of God's displeasure in turning from Israel to the Gentiles, as certainly as Israel used to turn from Jehovah to false gods. But the threat, now accomplishing after the utmost patience, and only accomplished when they added to their old idolatry the still graver sin of rejecting the Messiah and disdaining the gospel that offered them the pardon of these and all other sins by His blood, – the threat itself contains the no less sure intimation of restoring mercy in the end. For certainly He who acts with a view to provoke them to jealousy through blessing the Gentiles does not mean to cast them off eventually; rather the very reverse. One sees by such admirable reasoning and such profoundly accurate employment of the Old Testament scripture how truly it is the same Spirit who wrote of old by Moses working now by Paul.

Apart from any particular allusion, the state of things whether now or by and by accords perfectly both with the facts of Christianity and with the general prospects for the world according to the prophets. For it is just when the Jews lose all their place and nation no less than distinctive rank as a witnessing and worshipping people in their land that we see the Gentiles gradually renouncing their idols, and the true God and His word incomparably better known than even of old in Israel. Revealed truth, having its centre and display in Christ, alone accounts for the eclipse on the one side and the possession of a brighter light on the other. Did not the Jews reject the true light which now shines on nations so long benighted in idolatry?

Again, while owning the mercy of God, which has thus wondrously turned aside to visit the Gentile with the gospel during the continued unbelief and consequently dark and wretched nothingness of the Jew, who can overlook the rich and full stream of Old Testament scripture which depicts the joy and blessedness of the whole earth only when God causes His face to shine on Israel? "God shall bless *us*" (says the inspired Jewish psalmist); "and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

It is right to preach, a privilege to look for souls to be blessed; but it is vain, because unscriptural, to expect universality of blessing and delivering power over the world as a whole till Zion's light is come and the glory of Jehovah is risen on her. Then and not before shall the Gentiles come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; then the nation and kingdom that will not serve Zion shall perish – a state of things in evident contrast with the grace that goes out now to Jew and Gentile indiscriminately, and gathers believing souls by the Spirit for heavenly and eternal glory, instead of being a display of the righteous government of Jehovah-Messiah in Israel and over all the earth.

Hence it is obvious with what strict truth the apostle could affirm that the salvation to the Gentiles, by the slip or trespass of the Jews, is but to provoke them to jealousy instead of being a sign of being abandoned for ever as a people by God. Nay further he could reason, in harmony with the prophets, that if their trespass is the world's wealth, and their loss and diminution the Gentiles' wealth, how much more their fulness? The apostle here accounts, or, if one will, apologizes, for his bringing in the Gentiles when discussing the destiny of Israel. He was speaking to the saints at Rome, **"to you the Gentiles."** Further, **"inasmuch therefore as I am apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry:"** how or why should *he* forget the divine mercy to such hinging on God's ways with Israel that now occupied him? Especially too as he was thereby seeking to further that provocation to jealousy for which he had the authority of Him who alone is good and of whose compassion toward Israel he was no less assured than of His righteous displeasure at their sins. **"If by any means I may provoke to jealousy [those who are] my flesh and may save some of them."** (Ver. 14.)

"For if their rejection [be the] world's reconciliation, what their reception but life from among [the] dead?" Such we have seen is the uniform impression left by the Psalms and the Prophets, as every candid

and intelligent Jew must feel. Then only will be "the regeneration" when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory with His glorified assessors, and all the nations as well as the twelve tribes of Israel shall know what it is to have a king reigning in righteousness and princes ruling in judgment.

It is the mistake of Origen, Chrysostom, and Theodoret, of Meyer, Fritzsche, Tholuck, etc., to bring in the resurrection literally as meant here, though I doubt not that the first resurrection will have then taken place as proved by the most positive evidence of scripture. Nor is there just ground for Dean Alford's singular indecision who objects both to the true and to the erroneous view. Whatever the divine mercy in the "world's reconciling" which we now know while the gospel goes forth to every creature, a wholly different blessedness awaits the whole earth as "life from the dead," when all Israel received back and saved, far from their old envy and churlish scorn, shall bid all the lands to sing joyfully to Jehovah and come before His presence with triumphal song.

If His house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, in that day also is His name to be great among the nations, and in every place incense is to be burnt and a pure offering offered to His name. How far beyond the present, and how different, though the present may be an earnest and pledge! Will it not be for all on earth "life from the dead?"

It seems to my mind that Calvin is far from having a simple, clear, or strong view of the argument, though I do in no wise deny his generally grave and pious sentiments. But he says that you will be greatly hampered in understanding this discussion, except you take notice that the apostle speaks, sometimes of the whole nation of the Jews, sometimes of single individuals. The truth is that the question is exclusively about the nation as God's witness on earth and inheriting the line of promise from Abraham.

There was no doubt about individuals. But Paul, we have seen, beautifully uses the faith of himself and others as a proof that even during the judicial hardening there is a remnant according to the election of grace, and that the call of Gentiles meanwhile is but a provocation to jealousy, instead of implying that God cast away His people, and that they have fallen never more to be received as Israel. And here I cannot

but deplore the presumption, as well as ignorance, with which even so godly a person as the Genevese chief speaks, especially on verse 12.

* The apostle should have been humbly listened to, not corrected. Need I add that the rudeness of speech belongs exclusively to the critic, and that the inspiration is thoroughly exact, not the too confident commentator? A human antithesis, which Calvin ventured to say would have been more proper, is in force, beauty, and truth far short of that which the Spirit has given. A rising or raising up of Israel conveys no such import of necessary blessedness as their "reception" after their stumble, loss, and rejection. Even if we did not see and could not prove this, every believer is bound to resent such want of respect to scripture.

{* "Magis autem proprie locutus fuisset, si lapsui opposuisset suscitationem. Quod ideo admoneo, nequis dicendi ornatum hic requirat, aut offendatur ista dicendi ruditate. Pectus enim, non linguam, ut formarent, haec scripta sunt." In loc. p. 151.}

Here the apostle adds some observations which not only confirm but explain much: these the reader should the more sedulously weigh because they are in general ill understood. **"But if the first-fruit* [be] holy, the lump also; and if the root [be] holy, the branches also. But if some of the branches were broken off, and *thou*, being a wild olive, wast graft in among them and wast made fellow-partaker of the root and** of the fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches: but if thou boastest, not *thou* bearest the root but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, Branches† were broken off in order that *I* might be graft in. Well; through unbelief they were broken off, and *thou* standest by faith. Be not highminded but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, it may be he will not spare even thee."** (Ver. 16-21.)

From principles familiar to the Jew in the Old Testament the reasoning is drawn, and the ways of God in government are vindicated with singular force. The Jew, springing from Abraham, the one first chosen and called out to have promises in his line (though for all others in their effects), had been the natural trunk or branches of the olive tree. The Gentile grew wild outside. But God must have branches in keeping with the root, and, because the Jews were not, judgment proceeded against them.

It was evident then, first, that boasting least became the Gentiles, who had no necessary or natural connection with the root, the father of the faithful, like the Jews; secondly, that they had most reason to fear, for if God had dealt with the failure of the seed of Abraham, it was not to be conceived that He would tolerate Gentile iniquity. It belonged to the plan of God to graft the Gentile into the line of promise on earth, in place of Jewish branches broken off through their unbelief. By faith the Gentile stands: let him not be highminded but fear. Otherwise God will not spare.

{* There is not the least ground for the strange notion of Chalmers after Mede that by the first-fruit the apostle meant the earliest Jewish converts to Christianity, though no one denies that [James 1:18](#) applies the term to the Christian believers out of Israel, as [Jeremiah 2:3](#) had already done to Israel originally as such. It is demonstrable from the context that by the figures of the first-fruit with the lump (compare [Num. 15:19-21](#)) and the root with the branches the apostle is setting forth the relation and responsibility of those who followed him to whom the promises were given, as the stock of divine testimony on earth after men at large had fallen into idolatry. Theodoret, like Origen, indulges in the odd conceit that Christ is "the first-fruit," while rightly regarding Abraham as "the root." Both illustrations really point to the same.

The rendering here is as certain as the sense resulting from it is clear and good. With plurals or collectives ἐν regularly means "among," as in the Authorized Version, or "inter illos" as Grotius correctly translates The Vulgate ("in illis") is obscure; Calvin and Beza, not without predecessors among the fathers and followers in modern Germany, including even Olshausen and Meyer, give "*pro illis*" which is unequivocally without warrant.

Erasmus is far more right in his comment than Beza who cavils at it and adopts the sense which the former justly censures. But there is no need of resorting to the influence of the Hebrew preposition *in* however largely true elsewhere in the New Testament. What we find here is as common in classical as in Hellenistic Greek; but ἐν = in loco (or locum) is the usage nowhere that I know, and in my judgment impossible to reconcile with the genius of the language.

** The καί "and" is doubtful; ⱼ* B C, with the Coptic, and Damasus, reject it, probably others also; and we can readily see why some might bring it in to soften a phrase seemingly rugged without it.

† ⱼ A B C D^c F G L P and many cursives and fathers omit οἷ, which may readily have crept in from the context.}

"Behold then God's goodness and severity: upon them that fell severity, but upon thee God's goodness if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise *thou* also shalt be cut off. And they too, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be graft in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if *thou* wast cut off from the olive tree wild by nature, and contrary to nature wast graft into a good olive tree, how much more shall these who are according to nature be graft into their own olive tree?" (Ver. 22-24.)
{* Θεοῦ is attested by ⱼ A B C D^c beside many ancient versions.}

It is of the greatest moment to avoid confounding the continuous line of the inheritance of the promise on earth, the olive tree, with the mystery of Christ and the church where all is new and above nature. There is no breaking off members from the body, nor is the Jew a natural limb any more than the Gentile. All is heavenly grace and entirely distinct from the system of administered promises which began with Abraham, the first-fruit. No doubt those who compose the church, Christ's body, come in as branches standing through faith in the room of the broken off Jewish ones; but others do also who are mere professors of Christ, and do not appreciate God's goodness but forsake it for forms or scepticism or open evil, and will thus fall under His just severity when the moment arrives to cut off the faithless Gentile graft, as before the unbelieving natural boughs of Israel.

It is no question of saving grace here but of earthly responsibility according to the respective testimony, first of Israel, next of Christendom. A man of exercised conscience, or even of ordinary knowledge of the New Testament, cannot look on the Gentile profession of Christ east, west, north, south, and affirm seriously that they have continued in God's goodness; if not, the sentence is excision for the Gentile, as of old for the Jew. Will the tree then be cut down? In nowise more in the future than in the past. Contrariwise the judgment of the Gentile branches makes way for the grafting in of the Jews, for they will then no longer abide in unbelief, and God is able to graft them in again.

It is indeed "their own olive tree," which God never forgets, nor should the Gentile.

Thus we all may and should clearly see the distinctness of the responsibility of the creature, whether in Israel or in Christendom, from the security of the elect who are saved by grace. Salvation is of Him who is rich in mercy, possible only, though given fully and freely, to the believer in virtue of redemption. But this does not hinder the trial of now, as of Israel in the past. The revealed result is the apostasy; but grace will translate the saints risen or changed to meet the Lord at His coming, as His day will fall with unsparing judgments on His enemies and most severely on those who abuse in the worst way the best and brightest privileges. The cutting off of the apostate Gentile profession will make way for the reception of Israel.

The apostle had reasoned against the notion that God had cast away His people; first, from the remnant according to the election of grace, of whom he was himself a sample; and next, from God's revealed object in calling Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy, which brought in the beautiful and instructive episode of their own olive tree, still pointing in a similar direction; but now we come to a ground more definite and conclusive. The word of God has given express testimony to His purpose of recalling Israel in sovereign mercy after and spite of all their sins, giving them in the latter thorough repentance and turning their heart toward their Messiah so long rejected.

"For I do not wish you, brethren, to be ignorant of this mystery, in order that ye be not wise in your own conceits, that hardness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in; and so all Israel shall be saved, even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is the covenant on my part to them when I shall have taken away their sins." (Ver. 25-27.)

If the apostle used the Septuagint Version of two passages in Isaiah ([Isa. 59:20](#), [Isa. 27:9](#); compare also [Jer. 31](#)), in the Greek text as it now stands the phrase is neither "to" Zion, as in the Hebrew, nor "out of" Zion as in the epistle, but ἕνεκεν ("for the sake of"), save in two copies referred to by Holmes and Parsons in their great edition of the LXX, one of which is certainly a correction, the other probably so. That Origen, Chrysostom,

and Theodoret cite according to the New Testament decides nothing against the common text of the Seventy.

And this is confirmed by the plain fact that Origen, who had quoted the prophet when interpreting [Psalm 14](#) according to the apostle's form of citation, gives in his Hexapla the text of the LXX. just as it now stands, while we see Aquila and Symmachus adhering precisely to the Hebrew. It is evident to me that the last verses of [Psalm 16](#) and [Psalm 52](#) fully and literally justify the apostle, who was directed by the Holy Spirit to use the Old Testament in such a way as looks lax to the hasty, careless, or unbelieving, too disposed to regard an inspired man as like themselves, but really with the most comprehensive wisdom and the nicest exactitude, so as to convey the mind of God as contained in His word, not in one text only but out of many interwoven into one.

The Deliverer will come to Zion, out of which He will subsequently send the rod of His power for the full deliverance of His people, in the day that He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob and place him for ever under the new covenant.

Thus if the hardening of Israel (though, we may bless God, only in part) was then true and still goes on, long before announced, the same prophet and, we may add, the rest of the prophets anticipate the bright day for the earth when all Israel, as such, shall be saved. The πλήρωμα, fulness or full complement of the Gentiles, who now believe, will have come in; and so the long guilty, long chastened, people of Jehovah will turn to the Lord and own Him in the crucified Nazarene, their Lord and their God; even as Thomas who in this represents them, seeing Him and believing.

There is no comment in the New Testament more important for determining the just meaning of Old Testament prophecy. The allegorical school of ancients from Origen down to the moderns of our own day are in this far from the truth of God. Indeed it is as a system mere trifling and its root unbelief, as its dogmatic effect is to shake confidence in the plain written word, and its practical result is not only to deprive the ancient people of God of their hope, but to lower and obscure our own by substituting the earthly position of Israel (confused and spoiled by a so-called spiritualism) for separation to and union with Christ in heaven, the true place of the Christian and of the church.

It will astonish some of my readers to learn that Origen, undoubtedly one of the ablest and most learned of the early Greek fathers, speaks of Zion as representing the Father in this very connection! Others may be more sober; but they understood the truth no better than he, if they did not commit themselves to such wild flights of fancy. If some might have hoped better things of Theodoret, like Chrysostom, I am forced to prove how precarious is the teaching which, after saying truly that the Jews will believe, on the conclusion of the work spoken of among the Gentiles, tells us that "all Israel" means those who believe whether of Jews or of Gentiles. Even this meagre expectation of blessing at the end for Israel is boldly denied by Jerome (Comm. Esai. xi.), who will have all to be understood of the first advent!

Nor did the reformers clear themselves from the ignorance and prejudice of the fathers, partly through their dread of Anabaptist violence and fanaticism in their dreams of a fifth kingdom, dreams which after all are far more akin to the theories of Rome and the fathers than to the holy and heavenly hopes given in the written word. For it will be observed that such visionaries look for a Zion of their own on earth, just as in a modified sense their adversaries interpret the prophets of the church. All were at fault, though in different directions; so must all be who do not see the church's portion to be a heavenly one with Christ at His coming, who will restore His people to the enjoyment of every promised blessing and glory on the earth, the nations being then only blessed as a whole though subordinately. But the risen saints will reign with Christ over the earth. We are blessed in heavenly places in Him.

Hence we can understand the vacillation of Luther. But Calvin was always wrong, as an instance of which may suffice his interpretation of this place where he makes "all Israel" to mean the whole of those saved, the Jews having only the superior place as the firstborn.*

{ "Multi accipiunt de populo Judaico, acsi Paulus diceret instaurandum adhuc in eo religionem ut prius; sed ego Israelis nomen ad totum Dei populum extendo, hoc sensu: Quum Gentes ingressae fuerint, simul et Judaei ex defectione se ad fidei obedientiam recipient: atque ita complebitur salus totius Israelis Dei, quem ex utrisque colligi oportet: sic tamen ut priorem locum Judaei obtineant, ceu in familia Dei primogeniti." (Comm. in loc.)*

Nor is his reason sounder than his conclusion; for he considers the mystic sense to suit better because Paul wished to point out here the consummation of Christ's kingdom, "*quae in Judaeis minime terminatur sed totum orbem comprehendit.*" The argument really goes to confirm what is denied; for the church is essentially an election out of Jews and Gentiles, and never can embrace the whole world; whereas the salvation of Israel at Christ's coming to reign inaugurates and characterizes His kingdom over all the earth. Compare [Zechariah 12](#), [14](#).}

Much more correctly have Beza on the Protestant side, and Estius on the Catholic expounded the verse and shown the opposition of πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ in the future hardening ἀπὸ μέρους, which strictly means "in part," not a mere qualifying of a severe declaration, "until" also specifying the point of time at which the great change takes place.

To say with Calvin that "until" (ἄχρις οὗ) does not mark this but only equivalent to "that" shows the strong prejudice of a good man whose knowledge of the language was imperfect and who missed to a great extent the point of the chapter before him, through that wisdom in one's own conceit against which the apostle is warning the Gentiles. That "the fulness of the Gentiles" *cannot* mean the general conversion of the world to Christ, is perfectly certain if it were only from the previous reasoning of the apostle in the central portion of the chapter, where he asks if the slips of the Jews were the world's riches, how much more their fulness? and shows how he was provoking them to jealousy to save some; for if their rejection be the world's reconciling, what their reception but life from among the dead?

And this, as already shown, harmonizes with the constant testimony of the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, which invariably make the blessing of Israel as a creation the condition and under God the means of the blessing of all the earth – a new state of things, not the gospel or the church as now known, both of which are inconsistent with it, but the kingdom in its manifestation of glory when in the broadest sense all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Here the commentators are, I must say, painfully defective. The effort of some ancients, and of moderns like Grotius and Hammond, to find the accomplishment in the apostolic times is of all schemes the grossest absurdity, and the most directly opposed to the text commented on.

It may be added that, though Dean Alford took the term Israel in its proper sense, he like the rest spoils much of the force of the truth by winding up with the assertion that the matter here treated is *their reception into the church of God*. Not so. The question of the olive tree stands wholly distinct from the church, though no doubt there are branches now in the olive tree since Pentecost which are also members of Christ's body, the assembly of God. But the olive tree is another idea altogether and embraces the dealings of God on the footing of promise since Abraham through Israel of old, the Gentile profession now, and Israel again in the millennial age, not believers only but responsibility according to the privileges given, with judgment executed on the faithless Jewish branches of the tree to let in the Gentiles, as it will be executed on the disobedient Gentiles when God will give repentance to Israel and remission of sins at the appearing of Christ and His kingdom.

Hence the apostle goes on to affirm what is wholly different from the gospel and church state. **"According to the gospel, [they are] enemies on your account; but according to the election, beloved on account of the fathers.* For the gifts and the calling of God [are] irrevocable."** (Ver. 28, 29.)

The meaning is that, after the Jews proved their hostility to the gospel instead of being saved by it, which God turns, as we have seen, to His gracious call of the Gentiles meanwhile, election love will still prove faithful in the latter day to the sons for the sake of the fathers. This is not the principle on which souls are blessed now whether from Gentiles or from Jews. There is no difference. All are alike guilty and lost through their sins; all alike forgiven and saved through faith. But after the actual unbelief of the Jews, sovereign mercy will interpose at the end of the age. For the gifts and the calling of God admit of no regret on His part. He may repent of creation ([Gen. 6](#)), never of what grace gave in promise to Abraham and to his seed, never of His call which was first illustrated publicly in the father of the faithful. According to that "election" He will yet break their stony heart and put a new spirit within them.

{* "*Incredulos fuisse redditos misericordia Gentibus exhibita, paulo asperius est; nihil tamen continet absurdi, quia Paulus excaecationis causam non assignat, sed tantum significat, quod ad Gentes transtulit Deus Judaeis fuisse ademptum.*" Comm. in loc. ed. Tholuck, p. 158.}

"For as ye were once disobedient to God but now have become objects of mercy through their disobedience, so have they also now become disobedient to the mercy shown to you, in order that they also may become objects of mercy. For God shut up together all in disobedience in order that he might show mercy to all." (Verses 30-32.)

Wiclif, Tyndale, and Cranmer, with the Vulgate, the Peshito and the Philoxenian Syriac, the Arabic, are here more correct than the Geneva Version, Beza, and the Authorized. Calvin seems nearer to the truth, but has not quite hit the mark. "That they became unbelievers through the mercy shown to the Gentiles" is indeed somewhat harsh; nor is there any need of his explanation for clearing up a difficulty created by his own mistake. The Jews rebelled against the mercy shown to the Gentiles as we learn from the Acts, 1 Thess. 2, etc., and as experience shows in fact to this day.

There appears to my mind not only an absence of any just sense in the modern view but positive error at issue with the chapter, the context, and scripture in general. With the chapter it clashes, because the previous argument treats the restoration of the Jews as life from the dead to the world, not the fulness of the Gentiles the means of their restoration; with the context, because the express point is to crush all conceit from both Jew and Gentile, and especially from the Gentile as now enjoying light whilst the Jew knows a dark and cold eclipse; with scripture at large, because nowhere is the mercy shown to the Gentiles hinted at as the (or a) means of Israel's recovery.

No doctrine can be conceived more foreign to the Bible than that it is by the instrumentality of believing Gentiles that Israel as a nation shall at length look to Christ and so obtain mercy. As the Gentiles were warned that they must be cut off if they continued not in God's goodness (and none but the most unspiritual, not to say hardened, can affirm that they have so continued), the sentence is excision, not the honour of bringing Israel into the faith. No doubt the believing Gentiles will be translated to higher blessedness, as the believing Jews were when the faithless Jews were cut off.

Thus the prime object is to extinguish all self-confidence and boasting. As mercy alone accounted for bringing in the Gentiles on Israel's rebellion against God, so the Jews when grafted into their own olive tree will feel

that nothing but mercy could have done it or explain it, somewhat in unison of spirit with the apostle of the circumcision when at the council of Jerusalem he uttered the memorable words, so worthy of the occasion, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they" (the Gentiles), *not* they, even as we (the Jews).

Thus they were all sinners; and the dealings of God in holiness and love and truth only brought out the stubborn insubjection of both Jew and Gentile, on the one hand, and the incomparable mercy of God, on the other: man's claims, righteousness, privileges, all ending in unbelief and rebellion, but God never more truly shining as God than in His mercy enduring for ever.

Can one wonder that the large and fervent heart of the apostle, animated and filled yet guarded by the inspiring Spirit, breaks forth in an outburst of praise as he looks back on the grace and ways of God in Christ? **"O depth of God's riches* and wisdom and knowledge: how unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! For who has known Jehovah's mind? or who became his counsellor? or who first gave to him and it shall be repaid to him? Because of him and through him and to him [are] all things: to him the glory unto the ages. Amen."** (Ver. 33-36.) He is the source, means, and end of all He has counselled, accomplished, or purposes still to effect for His own glory.

{* Or "both of God's wisdom" etc. as in the Authorized Version.}

The appropriateness of the doxology to the epistle is not only remarkable in itself but exactly in place where it stands. Indeed it is not alone; for, as we have a very brief one in the first chapter, we have another very notable in the last. Here it is the admiration of his soul as he looks back on the triumphs of divine mercy – the last thing of which man would think in discussing the dispensations of God. Yet to the spiritual mind subject to the written word and confiding in the known characters of God as He has revealed Himself in Christ, such is the bright and blessed and adoring conclusion.

The depth of His wealth, wisdom, and knowledge is to be seen, felt, proved, but unfathomable; His decisions beyond scrutiny, His ways not to be traced out, yet all open to our learning of Him with ever swelling praise. For who knew Jehovah's mind? or who became His counsellor? Yet has not the apostle touched on other and heavenly purposes for the glory

of Christ in the church, of which he speaks to the Ephesian saints in due season.

Here he had only been given to develop the righteousness of God in the face of man's unrighteousness, known from the beginning and revealed all along, and the methods by which God humbles the pride of each and gives the fullest scope to His mercy, causing evil itself to set forth good with the utmost lustre. Who then has given to God and made Him debtor to repay? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things: to Him be the glory for ever. The gospel is His, the righteousness His, the grace His, and so is the glory. To Him then with the apostle our hearts join in ascribing the display of perfect excellency without end.