

Romans 11

This chapter is used by Jewish Root teachers to assert that Israel is the true root of the church and that Christians should recover their 'Jewish roots' in order to be blessed by God. In actual fact, nothing could be further from Paul's mind. It is necessary, therefore, to carefully establish what Paul is actually saying in this chapter.

Introduction: summary of the argument in Rm 9-11

Paul's argument in Romans 11 must be read in the context of the whole letter. Why does Paul mention Israel at all? Paul explains his point in Rm 1:15-17; he is preaching the Gospel to these believers in Rome whom he has not yet met and cannot teach in person. Though some may have been Jews most were not since Jews had been recently expelled from Rome. In fact he addresses them as 'Gentiles' in Rm 11:13. Paul is not writing a paper on Israel; he is not explaining Jewish roots to Gentiles; his main purpose is to explain the Gospel in fullness to Gentiles.

A key part of Paul's Gospel teaching was to explain God's purposes in election, and justification by faith which arises from it. The 'invisible' root of our salvation is being chosen by God (Eph 1:4). Paul shows that this is the first link in the chain in Rm 8:30. God's main object lesson to illustrate election and calling is the nation of Israel. They are the chosen (= elect) people of the OT. Calling did not depend upon them, in fact God says that they were the least of the nations (Deut 7:7) and God knew they would fail (Ezek 16, read all the severe words, c.f. Rm 10:20). Despite this, God preserved a faithful remnant out of love. Paul's purpose in Rm 9-11 is to explain election by reference to Israel as the historical chosen people of God.

Paul starts with the election of Jacob and the passing by (reprobation) of Esau (Rm 9:9ff). Paul explains that being a Jew is of no value without faith (Rm 9:6-7); faith is the expression of election, only the elect have faith. Esau (a Jew) had no faith and was not elect, and was not loved by God (Rm 9:13). All this points to the sovereignty of God in salvation (Rm 9:16), as the potter illustration makes clear. In this sovereignty, God calls other nations, not just Jews (Rm 9:24) and only a part of Israel will be saved (Rm 9:27). The 'visible' basis (root) of salvation is shown to be faith (Rm 9:32) which is a gift from God (Eph 2:8-10) given to the elect. The key problem with the Jews was to pursue salvation by works (Rm 9:32-33, 10:2-4), as such she is a lesson to people of all nations.

Paul elucidates this theme of justification by faith in chapter 10 and adds that preaching the Gospel is vital for this occur. To demonstrate the love of God for the remnant of Israel, Paul explains in chapter 11 that God has not finally repudiated her (Rm 11:1-2). At the moment God preserves a remnant as a demonstration of grace (Rm 11:6), the rest are hardened and blinded (Rm 11:7-10). Salvation now comes to Jews in the normal manner of the Gospel; when saved they receive life from death (Rm 11:15).

So, Paul exhorts Gentile believers in Romans 11 to learn from the lesson of Israel which has stubbornly disobeyed God. Israel responds with unbelief to the promises of God (chapter 9; e.g. Rm 9:6, 31-33) and to the preaching of the Gospel (chapter 10; e.g. Rm 10:3, 21) but there is a small remnant that is saved by the Gospel (chapter 11).

Key themes in Romans 11

Election: 'election of grace', verse 5. 'The elect'; verse 7.

The remnant of Israel being an illustration of election: 'there is a remnant according to the election of grace', verse 5. Compare Rm 9:27, 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved'. 'Save some of them', verse 14.

Reprobation, as illustrated by Israel: 'the rest were blinded', verse 7. 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day', verse 8. 'Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see', verse 10. 'Their being cast away', verse 15.

Exegesis

The elect of Israel is only a remnant

1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,

3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?

4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

God has not cast away all of Israel. The people of Israel as a whole were not the chosen people but only the elect within it. The majority were cast away and rejected; indeed they are enemies of God through disobedience (Rm 11:28, 30). However, there is a remnant and Paul is one example. Like Paul, many Israelites were brought into the church by the Gospel and were saved, proving that they were elected.

It is this remnant, which constitute 'His people' (verse 2). These are the children of Abraham who have faith (Rm 4:11); whether circumcised or not. In this chapter we see that there are children of Abraham without faith (Jews) who are cast away; and there are children of Abraham with faith (Jews and Gentiles) who are God's people.

A picture of this remnant is the example of Elijah after the incident at Mt. Carmel. Elijah was distraught that Israel had rebelled against God, had killed the prophets and broken God's altars, i.e. even destroying the foundations of godly worship, leaving no true believers left. God reassures Elijah that he still has 7,000 men who are elect out of all Israel. This picture models 'the election of grace'; only a small proportion of Israel will be saved.

Salvation is not by works

6 And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."

9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them.

10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

Continuing his previous argument, Paul explains that election is not secured by works and human strength but by God's choice in eternity. It is God's sovereign choice that gives grace to some and not others. Grace, by its very nature, rules out human works. Religious effort based upon works (e.g. Judaism) is not based on grace and is thus condemned.

Thus national Israel did not obtain the promise; only the elect obtain salvation (v7). The rest of Israel, who are not elect, are blinded so that they do not see the Gospel of Christ (v8, 10). Israel, to this day, has not obtained what it seeks (verse 7, 'seeks' = present tense) and never obtained it in the past (verse 7, 'not obtained' = aorist tense), referring to God's righteousness.

'Blinded' refers to judicial condemnation; a punitive hardening; reprobation; this judicial hardening follows self-hardening (cf. Pharaoh: Ex 7:13, 8:15; Rm 9:18). The remnant with faith is saved but the nation in general is hardened. Most translations use the word 'blindness' as when calluses form over the eyes; but the Greek word chiefly applies to a hardening; lifelessness; petrification.

Notice Paul's dividing of Israel into two halves: the elect and the rest who are hardened; those with faith and those who trust in works; those who are saved and those under judgment. This is crucial to understanding the chapter.

'As it is written' refers to a number of OT statements used previously by Jesus and other apostles. For instance: Matt 13:10-15; Jn 12:37-43. Some of the OT texts are Isa 6:9, 29:10; Ezek 12:12 and Deut 29:4. The fact that God has not ended the Jewish race for its continual disobedience is down to God's long-suffering (Rm 9:22).

Not only do fleshly Jews have blind eyes, but they have deaf ears and a spirit of stupor (torpor, insensibility, being unresponsive; v8). This is given them by God to ensure that they do not hear the Gospel. Therefore, they are reprobate. The very blessings God gave them became a snare to them. Paul explains reprobation, or being chosen for punishment in eternity, in chapter 9.

The quote from Psalm 69:23, 25 is a further witness against Israel and very striking. David's imprecation is directed against his enemies, and the enemies of God, calling for divine condemnation; which is inspired by the Spirit as the word of God. Paul uses these same words against Israel making Israel the enemy of God; this is plainly reaffirmed in Rm 11:28. (See: *The causes of Israel's rejection in Romans 9-11*, later). 'Table' refers to earthly prosperity, which is here cursed as a trap. Jewish prosperity becomes a snare; a curse.

The Messiah they awaited became a stumbling block to them (v9). Israel stumbled over the rock that is Christ (Isa 8:14; Rm 9:32-33). However, the word *skandalon* means more than an ordinary stumbling stone and refers to a trap, or the trigger of a baited trap. What is implied by all this is death. Fleshly Israel is ensnared. This is said to be 'recompense'; in other words God is returning her sins upon her in judgment.

The blindness of verse 10 repeats the earlier blindness and explains that Israel's material prosperity is thought, by her, to be a blessing of God; in fact it is God's curse. Dispensationalists often use the prosperity Jews have brought to Israel with American dollars as proof of her being blessed by God. In fact, this is blindness. The prosperity is a trap to ensnare her into stupor. Modern Israel does not see that she is offending God with every move she makes, convinced that she is blessed. In fact she is hardened into insensibility until the trap springs at the end when Jesus returns. What is extremely foolish is when supposed Christians support Israel in this sin.

Israel's blindness is also explained differently by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:14-16:

Their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Here he uses the illustration of a veil, comparing it to the veil Moses put on his face to hide the glory of God. Whenever Jews read the Old Testament they cannot see the truth about the Messiah in it. They cannot see God's words and they cannot find salvation because the veil blinds their eyes and hardens them.¹ Only when they turn to Christ and receive the Gospel is this veil taken away. Only Christ can take away this blinding veil and that only happens in the elect when they accept the Gospel as a result of the faith God gives.

Thus Paul, in 2 Corinthians, says exactly the same thing: there is a blindness and hardening upon Israel in general, but the elect who turn to Christ are saved from it. Thus there are two types of Jew, one who is fleshly and reprobate and the other who is elect and saved in Christ. Nothing a Jew does according to the tradition of Judaism will take the blindness away. Nothing that is part of Israel is blessed; it is only hardened. Only when Jews abandon fleshly Israel and turn to Christ are they saved and blessed. This is the opposite of modern Jewish Root teaching.²

The fall of Israel

11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles.

12 Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,

14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them.

15 For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

Paul says that they both did fall and did not fall in verse 11. By this he means that the elect did not fall; there are always some believing Jews, but the nation as a whole did fall. The fall of Israel from grace enabled salvation to come to the Gentiles. Before the cross there was only salvation in Israel, a small nation, but after the cross salvation is now universal, to all nations.

Salvation is by faith in Christ but Israel could not accept that and wanted salvation to be by works, by following the law. This caused them to fall. Peter explains that this was disobedience. Notice that Peter categorically states that those who rejected Christ were predestined to reprobation.

Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offence." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed [ordained]. 1 Pt 2:7-8

In this way Israel is a picture of both election and reprobation. The remnant are elect and the rest are reprobate. They stumbled because they were 'appointed' to stumble. This is the essence of Paul's argument in Romans 9-11, supported by Peter. Thus Israel is an illustration of Paul's whole argument about the Gospel being based upon faith and not works, and upon calling not privilege. Far from establishing national Israel as blessed by God, as claimed by Jewish Root teachers, Paul is at pains to show that she has been cast away as a result of her disobedience and fall (v12, 15). There is only hope for 'some of them' (v14); 'they have not all obeyed the gospel,' (Rm 10:16).

¹ Blindness is the same Greek word as in Romans 11:7 (*poroo*), meaning 'hardening'.

² The essence of Jewish Root teaching is not only that Jews are a privileged race and that Israel is blessed under God's covenant, but that Christians will be blessed if they support and pray for fleshly Israel and adopt Jewish culture and rituals.

However, one blessing that results from the fall of Israel is the acceptance of the Gentiles. Now that salvation has been taken away from Israel and her mission to evangelise the world has been cancelled, the Gospel can go out to the whole world through the church. The Gospel is now universal instead of being restricted to one nation.

This is what is emphasised in this section: Israel rejected the salvation God brought in Christ but this rejection led to the conversion of the Gentiles. The fact that salvation has come to the Gentiles (whom Jews treated as dogs) made Israel jealous (v11). This jealousy was predicted by Moses (Rm 10:19 quoting Deut 32:21). This jealousy provokes two reactions: amongst some it make them bitter and strengthens their rejection of Christ but others (a remnant) want the blessing and get saved, becoming Christians.

Israel's fall results in riches to the world (v12). This fact stands out when we see that some Jews (the remnant) embrace this fulness, these riches, and become Christians. There is no basis here for claiming that there will be a national conversion in Israel in a millennium or at the end of the world. Nothing is said about it. Furthermore, the Greek construction in verses 11 and 12 shows that these results (the fall of Israel and the riches of the Gentiles making Jews jealous) are contemporaneous; the one produces the other always and at once.³ There is no gap of thousands of years between the riches coming to Gentiles and the Jews becoming jealous resulting in their fulness. Paul does not say, 'much more will be their fulness in the future'. He says 'how much more' is their fulness already.

Israel has fallen, has lost salvation, has failed, but also has fulness; however, the fulness is only in the remnant as Paul has already explained (Rm 11:5, 7). Fulness of salvation is only ever by faith in Christ; Paul knows and teaches no other Gospel (Gal 1:7-9). Jews who gain the fulness of salvation do so by becoming Christians. There is no Jewish exclusiveness in the fulness; Jews get saved in the same way as Gentiles; there is no difference.⁴ Notice Paul's method in Acts. He preached in synagogues, was rejected by Jews, which provoked a local split and Paul then gathered the faithful Jews into a Christian congregation. This is the opposite of the current practice of Jewish Root teachers who are trying to Judaise Christian churches.

Despite Israel's fall, Paul naturally is concerned about his own nation and seeks to save some of them, even by provoking them to jealousy if need be (v14). He argues that if their fall led to the expansion of the Gospel to the world, how beneficial is the fact of saved Jews coming into the kingdom, coming into the fulness of what they were originally promised if they believed (12, 15). Thus saved Jews are resurrected Jews, those who have received life out of death. The basis of the Gospel is the gift of eternal life, new life in Christ, receiving by regeneration. The casting away of Israel led to the universal Gospel; the salvation of each single Jew is life from the dead.

A literal translation of verse 15 is, '**for if the casting away of them - a reconciliation of the world, what the reception - but life from the dead?**' There is no thought here of a future revival that brings life to a dead Gentile church (as claimed by many). The casting away of Jews brought salvation to Gentiles; when Jews are received into the church it is life from the dead for them.

'Acceptance' ('reception', lit.) has no thought of a future revival but refers to the remnant that Paul has in mind (verse 5, 7). It thus has reference to the acceptance of those Jews Paul has made jealous and is converting (and by implication, of those who are similarly

³ 'To' ... 'so that' (*eis to*) with the infinitive expresses result, especially here. See Lenski, *Int. of Romans*, p693.

⁴ 'But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.' Rm 3:21-22.

saved by other Gospel preachers). There is no future tense here. Even the NKJV is wrong to insert 'will' here. Equally wrong is the AV and ASV 'shall' and the NASB, RSV, NRSV and NIV 'will'. Ironically, the pro-Israel Dispensationalist John Darby translates it accurately.

So, 'life from the dead' is not a new invigoration of spiritual life in the church when countless numbers of Jews suddenly get saved, in a tribulation, millennium or otherwise. In fact, as the end approaches the church is persecuted and weakened (Matt 24:12; Lk 18:8; 2 Thess 2:3). Neither is there any indication of a Jewish revival immediately followed by the end of the world and the resurrection of the saints. Nothing in Scripture informs us that the return of Christ is consequent to a revival in Israel. Finally, the resurrection at the last day is called, the 'resurrection (*anastasis*) from the dead' and never, 'life (*zoe*) from the dead' (as here).

Note the effects of the casting away of Israel:

- Salvation coming to the Gentiles; (Rm 11:11).
- Riches of the world - riches of the Gentiles; (Rm 11:12).
- Reconciliation of the world; (Rm 11:15).

Why would any Christian want to go back to what God cast away and leave the riches God has given the church in Christ (as Jewish Root teachers advise)? This is like a dog going back to his own vomit or a washed pig wallowing in mire (2 Pt 2:22).

The root issue

16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.

17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Rm 11:16-18

Just consider this for a moment, considering Paul's view of legalistic law-keeping, Jews and Judaising expressed in his letters,⁵ is it possible to think that he can suddenly teach that fleshly Israel is the supporting root of the church as claimed by Jewish Root teachers?

Paul has been at pains, in this letter, to teach about justification by faith and has had much to say, in framing his doctrine, about Abraham as the foundation of faith; the first to hear the true Gospel and to see Christ (Jn 8:56); the first to be proclaimed righteous on account of his faith (cf. Isa 51:1-2). Christ is the true root of our faith, in the sense of being the church's foundation; and God's decree is the root of our election. However, Paul is using Israel as an illustration of election here; within the structure of Paul's argument (which in chapters 9-11 is about election not Israel) the root is the faith of Abraham in Christ – the basis of the covenant. The vast majority of sound evangelical scholars agree on this interpretation. A few commentators would opt for the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a whole.

Abraham is the father of all who believe ('that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised,' Rm 4:11). Paul's argument is that the first-fruit of Israel was Abraham. His family was the first to obey God in circumcision to signify Jewishness. 'The first-fruit is holy' refers to the righteousness of Abraham by faith, already discussed in chapter 4-5.

⁵ For example: Phil 3:2, 'Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!' 1 Thess 2:14-16: 'For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.'

The branches that flow from this root, from the same faith of Abraham, are also holy. Jews who had no faith were broken off from the covenant and Gentiles who did have faith were grafted in. This was true in the OT (Naaman, Rahab) as well as in the NT (Gentile churches). Only those who have faith stay on the tree, Jews and Gentiles.

There is no sane way to see Israel as the root here without eisegesis (reading stuff into Scripture); the very error that Jewish Root teachers harp on about. If Israel is the root, what are the branches? It can't be both the root and the branches as Paul differentiates between them. But Jewish Root teachers want both the root and the branches to be Israel. It is important to understand here that Paul keeps changing between natural Israel according to the flesh and spiritual Israel according to election (which is the theme of chapters 9-11). [Paul does this elsewhere also, 'For they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rm 9:6); i.e. not everyone is elect Israel who are Jewish ('of Israel'). Here Paul uses the term 'Israel' to refer both to the whole elect and Jews.] Thus care must be taken when reading the word 'Israel' and not always taking it literally.

Context is crucial in understanding the Bible. The greater context of the letter is to explain the Gospel to Romans, not to write a treatise on Israel. The immediate context is chapters 9-11, which is an argument about election, not about Israel. Paul uses Israel as an illustration of election, based upon the root of Israel's election – the divine calling of Abraham and faith as the outcome of that calling. Those with faith are elect, those without faith are left in sin – whether Jews or Gentiles.

Regarding exegesis of the verses:

16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.

The firstfruit is holy;⁶ that is Abraham, the firstfruit of the chosen nation of Israel. The lump is holy; that is the true seed of Abraham, which Paul tells us is those who have faith ('For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God', Rm 2:28-29). If the root is holy (Abraham) then the branches from that root will be holy (those with the faith of Abraham). Thus the 'lump' and the branches are the spiritual descendants of Abraham who share his faith in Christ. '*The branches are not the whole Jewish nation*', (Lenski⁷).

17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

Some branches from Abraham were broken off because they did not have faith. This refers to all Jews who did not have faith like Abraham. True sons of Abraham are those with faith not those from mere physical descent.

For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Rm 9:6-8

'Fatness' refers to sap, the nourishment of the tree. The grafting in of a wild olive tree (contrary to nature) is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Gospel. Gentile believers have good fellowship with Jewish believers because they share the same life; they are part of the

⁶ 'Firstfruit' referred to the first sheaf of grain harvested. From the first dough made of the new grain a portion was separated and baked for the Lord as a heave offering. Its holiness was the result of being sanctified unto God.

⁷ *Interpretation of Romans*, p703. RCH Lenski was perhaps the best commentator on the Greek text of any; therefore, his comments are especially useful where the text is contentious.

same body. Gentiles come into the promises originally made with Abraham, which is why he is a father of many nations (Gen 17:4-5).

18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Rm 11:16-18

It is the root of Abrahamic faith that supports the branches (those who are holy, v16). What is holiness? It is likeness to God. How is this gained? Only by salvation in Christ whereby we are brought into a holy nation. What is the basis of this salvation? Faith; a faith given by God to the elect alone. It is impossible to see Israel as the root here. To teach that is tantamount to denying salvation by faith and claiming that national Israel makes people holy. If we are to boast about anything, we should boast about the faith that God gave us to be saved. To boast about Israel instead, a disobedient and unholy nation, is blasphemy.

No place for pride

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

20 Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

Paul is again using the illustration of Israel to make a point to believers.

The branches that were broken off were the majority of Israelites who were condemned for unbelief. Their unbelief showed that they were not of Abraham, who is the father of the faithful. This confirms Paul's earlier teaching that only those with faith are true sons of Abraham.

Remaining on the tree is standing by faith; 'you stand by faith'. There is no standing on the basis of nationality or race. Jews are not saved because they are Jews but only by their faith in Christ.

Paul then gives a warning, meant to shock; 'For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.' This does not mean that people can lose their salvation, an idea contrary to his teaching everywhere. What it means is that just as many Israelites gave the appearance of being elect, but in fact were always reprobate and disobedient, so people in the church can give the appearance of being saved but are not. It is faith that counts not appearances. Being in a visible, external body (e.g. the church or Israel) is not a guarantee of salvation; only faith ensures that a person is saved. In the same way it was the faith of Abraham that was accounted for righteousness.

Then Paul asks us to consider the goodness and severity of God. We should thank him for his goodness in saving the elect and opening the Gospel to all nations. However, we should also consider his severity in condemning the reprobate. This severity is something modern Christians do not wish to consider; just as they wish to hide reprobation under the carpet.

Paul also confirms that the proof of election is the continuation in God's goodness. Those who persevere are those who have faith. Abraham persevered through many tribulations and kept in God's goodness. His faith was genuine. Esau was Abraham's grandson, and yet Esau was rejected for his lack of faith and not continuing in God's goodness (Heb 12:16-17). Being of the right blood counts for nothing in God's purposes; what counts is having faith.

As Esau was 'cut off', so will anyone who is in the community of the faithful if they do not personally have faith. God's severity is shown in the cutting off of unbelievers.

Israelites who are grafted back in

23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this *is* My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

28 Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers.

The Gospel is now open to all nations, and this included Israel. Jews are to be saved in exactly the same way as any other nationality.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'. Rm 10:12-13

Nothing could be clearer; Jews are saved by the Gospel and having faith in exactly the same way that Gentiles are. There is no difference. There is one Gospel and one mediator between men and God. Those who teach that Jews will be saved by some other process because God loves them are teaching heresy and blaspheming Christ.

Therefore, Jews who do not continue in the national unbelief (the chief sin of Jews according to Paul) can be grafted back in again by God. In other words, Jews get saved when they believe the Gospel and show faith in Christ.

Verse 24 shows that this is easier for God to accomplish than saving a Gentile. Jews, as a race, were chosen to be friends of God. Though this gift has been removed from the nation (Matt 21:43), individuals can reclaim it by faith. Pagans have to be cut off from their existing system of thought (wild olive tree) and grafted into a new religion; Jews however, just need grafting into their own tree; i.e. coming into the good of the promises to Abraham. If God can save pagans, he can easier save Jews.

The next couple of verses have produced considerable debate amongst commentators for centuries; so we need to tread carefully.

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

First, what Paul talks about includes a mystery; that is, a hidden matter which is revealed by God to his chosen ones who have faith. He also implies that Christians can be ignorant of this and can also be wise in their own opinion but wrong and foolish in actual fact. What is the mystery? It is that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Blindness (or hardness of heart, *porosis*) refers to what Paul explained earlier that Jews are largely prevented, in God's judgment, from seeing the Gospel in Christ. This blindness is judicial and refers to reprobation, as we have already seen and as it does elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Matt 13:14-15; Eph 4:18). This blindness (hardness) of heart was observed early on by Stephen, 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you', (Acts 7:51). Paul has explained this judicial hardness of heart when dealing with Pharaoh in Rm 9:17, using him there as an example of reprobation, which Paul amplifies in Rm 9:18-23.

This continues 'until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in'. What does this mean?

There is no secret about this, it means simply the end of the age at the return of Christ. When have all the Gentile elect have come in? Only when the last Gentile elect person is converted and added to the church. This is at the end. God is holding back judgment until the last elect person has been saved (see 2 Pt 3:4-9).

The mystery is that, unlike many other nations, Israel continues to the end and that some individual Israelites continue to be saved until the end. This is the point of this whole chapter, to answer the question posed by Gentile believers in the early church that it appeared as if God's historic people were completely rejected. Jews will endure until the last elect Gentile is converted. The majority will be blinded, but some will be converted; the blindness is only in part. This is borne out by what we observe today; the majority of Israel is hardened and blinded towards Christ but a remnant continues to get saved. This will continue to the end.

The miracle of grace is that, although God could have destroyed the Jews entirely for their rejection of the Messiah and delivering him up to death, God has seen fit to preserve the race and to continually save a part of Israel until the end.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

Many commentators have taken the view that this refers to a national conversion of Israel in the future, something that is usually ascribed to a millennial period. This was not the original view of the passage but something initiated by a mistake of exegesis made by Augustine, which was taken up by Bede and then accepted by Roman Catholicism.

Dispensationalists later developed this and their many writings led to an widespread acceptance of the idea. Some Reformed commentators also posit a qualified agreement that some sort of future revival will arise in Israel. For many years I too was prepared to accept this with some qualification, chiefly that this is not the main point of the apostle here (which it is not). However, I am now certain that this is not meant at all and this more accurate interpretation is affirmed by many good commentators (see, for example, RCH Lenski's commentary).

Firstly, it cannot mean that at some future point all national Israel, or all Jews on earth, will be saved since Paul has already said that, 'For they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rm 9:6). In other words, not all Jews are recipients of the Gospel promise. He has also said that Israel is a, 'disobedient and contrary people,' (Rm 10:21); who have been cast off, have fallen and whose eyes have been blinded so that they cannot see the truth.

Second, if Israel is used as the illustration of election and reprobation, which we have established, then not all Israel could be saved since that would destroy the illustration. The point is that the elect in Israel are saved and the rest are reprobate; just as in the world.

Third, 'all Israel', if it refers to national Israel or the Jewish race, includes very many dead Jews who were not saved.

What the verse simply means is that all God's true Israel will be saved. Since, in God's eyes, 'they are not all Israel who are of Israel', then those who are really 'Israel' (that is all the elect Jews) will be saved.

'And so' is 'thus', 'in this way'. In other words, the hardening will continue upon Israel in general until the end of time but also out of this lump some (a remnant) will be saved by faith just like Gentiles. It does not mean 'then' positing a future revival. As the 'fulness of the Gentiles' means the full elect from the Gentiles, so 'all Israel' is the full number of saved Jews.

26 ... as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this *is* My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

28 Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers.

As in the past, so in the future; those Jews who are saved are the ones that God comes to and turns away from ungodliness. Elect Jews have their sins taken away by God's Deliverer; only those Jews are in God's covenant. So, there are two sorts of Jew, the first is blind to the Gospel and reprobate and these are always enemies of the church; enemies of the Gospel. The other sort are elect Jews and God has ordained that some Jews will continue to be saved until the end out of the love he had for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God keeps his promises and this includes his promises about the progeny of the patriarchs.

God does not love all Israel; how can he love that which he has judicially hardened and condemned to hell? How can he love that which he blinds and casts away? Again verse 28 distinguishes two Israel's: the first represents God's enemies who are not loved; the second represents the elect in Israel (Jacob) who are loved. The 'beloved' only concerns 'the election'.

'Taking away their sins' refers to justification by faith; this is the central teaching of Romans. The covenant that brings justification is the New Covenant; the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, as Paul explained in chapter 4 and 5.

Note: if this promise is to be applied to all Jews then it has already failed. The Deliverer has already come out of Zion; it is Christ the Lord; there is no other deliverer who takes away sins. The Deliverer does not come out of heaven as claimed by Premillennialists, but 'out of Zion', i.e. Christ's first advent. If 'Jacob' here meant 'all national Israel' or 'all Jews', then this promise has failed since the vast majority of Jews have rejected Christ and died in sin. 'Jacob' can only refer to the elect, which is what Jacob is indeed a type of. Premillennialists aver that 'Jacob' here means all Israel; but that is nonsense since it makes Scripture contradict itself.

The calling of God

29 For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable.

30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,

31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.

32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counsellor?"

35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

Paul is here closing the argument on election he began in chapter 9 and explains that the gift of God's mercy is irrevocable, or not regretted. It began in eternity and will work until the end according to his eternal purposes. We have seen repeatedly since Romans chapter 9 that this plan includes both election and reprobation set in eternity; it is irrevocable. Here Paul again confirms this by reference to the two sets of people he has been speaking about – elect Jews and elect Gentiles, to those who receive divine mercy in the Gospel.

This mercy works in the same way in both groups. Just as Gentiles previously were disobedient to God, but then obtained mercy as a result of the universalisation of the Gospel after Israel's disobedience; so also elect Jews receive mercy after their former disobedience.

Thus all the elect were once under disobedience but all are now recipients of mercy. This is the essence of the Gospel explained everywhere in the NT which can be broken down into this:

- The origin of the Gospel is in God's plan in eternity where the decisions are irrevocable.
- The elect are chosen to eternal life and the rest are left in their sins as reprobate.
- The elect, before they receive mercy in the Gospel, are disobedient, being sinners. They are enemies of God.
- The conversion of the elect is by the gift of faith, which results in justification and gaining mercy from God.

Therefore, what Paul states in these verses is entirely in accordance with his teaching on salvation elsewhere.

Thus all were once under disobedience in order that God may pour out his grace to give mercy to the elect. The emphasis is that it is God's mercy that saves and not human works. Neither pagan nor Jewish works lead to mercy.

Paul ends with a doxology of praise to the God whose eternal plan has worked all this out in his divine wisdom,

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counsellor?"

35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

Salvation is all of God and not dependent on the strength or wisdom of man. Who can counsel God? He chooses who are elect and who are reprobate in eternity and so salvation

is all of him. This decision is past our finding out; we must just accept it. This close of his argument reiterates what he initially said in Rm 9:14-24.

The Jewish Root lie

Now what Jewish Root teachers want this section to say is that as God has committed Israel to disobedience, so now all Israel will be saved; that is every Jew. Now Paul does not mention Israel in this section and his point is clearly aimed at both Gentiles and Jews. Since Paul is no Universalist then saying that all Gentiles and all Jews will be saved clearly only means all elect Gentiles and Jews. It is impossible to claim here that all Israel will be saved without saying that all Gentiles will also be saved; in other words, everybody will be saved. Some historic commentators have made this claim, but they are liberal Universalists.

This verse gives no support to Jewish Root teachings at all.

Final points

The importance of discerning things that differ

Very often in Scripture issues that cause considerable confusion relate to single words that have differing meanings. Thus 'calling' can refer to the external call of the Gospel message to everyone or the internal and effectual call that brings life to the elect. 'World' can mean the whole earth, a portion of it, or the sinful estate of culture in the world. 'Flesh' can mean human beings, nations, the human body or the sinful Adamic nature in believers. 'Law' can refer to the Mosaic law, the Old Covenant, or it can mean the eternal moral will of God for men (which is subsumed in the moral portions of the Mosaic Law); or it can point to the Law of Christ (which is the moral law of God applied by the Holy Spirit within believers) and it can sometimes just mean an ordinary law (as in the case of the 'law' of gravity).

In all such cases the only determination of meaning is by examining the context carefully to get to the writer's point. The context includes understanding the writer's theological perspective and specific purpose in the letter.

In the same way Paul uses 'Jerusalem' and 'Israel' in various senses and it is crucial to examine the context to understand what he means. Paul has told us that 'Israel' can mean the nation of Israel, Jews, but its theological and chief meaning is the elect remnant within Israel that has faith. He has made this clear in the book of Romans,

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. Rm 2:28-29

Thus unbelieving Jews are part of the Israel that has fallen and is under God's judgment for disobedience; believing Jews are part of God's kingdom. The first has circumcised flesh, the other has a circumcised heart.

Paul develops this principle in other ways, such as in Galatians. Here he explains that fleshly Israel is descended from Abraham according to the flesh, to human nature, to natural descent. However, the true Seed of Abraham is not this nation of the flesh but the nation that is in Christ since Christ is the true Seed of Abraham and all those in Christ are included by spiritual union.

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. Gal 3:7

The blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Gal 3:14

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. Gal 3:16

And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:29

Hagar ... corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children - but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Gal 4:25-26

Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. Gal 4:29 [Note: this was written to Celtic Galatians.]

Therefore, when 'Israel' or 'Jews' are mentioned in Romans, it is necessary to establish just what Paul means by the term. His line of argument must be carefully followed. Taking verses out of context will lead to a conclusion that is foreign to Paul's meaning. This is what Jewish Root interpreters do.

Let us distinguish some mentions of Israel and Jews in Romans 11.

Fleshy Israel under God's judgment	Spiritual Israel containing elect Jews
Has been cast away. Rm 11:15	Not cast away. Rm 11:2
	'A remnant according to the election of grace.' Rm 11:5
	Some of Israel are saved. Rm 11:14
'Israel has not obtained what it seeks.' Rm 11:7	'The elect have obtained it.' Rm 11:7
Blinded. Rm 11:7 This blindness continues on part of Israel until the end. Rm 11:25	Spiritual Israel is the part which is not blinded.
'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.' Rm 11:8	
Has become ensared, trapped and fallen upon a stumbling block. Rm 11:9	Has not stumbled and fallen. Rm 11:12
'Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see.' Rm 11:10	
'Bow down their back always.' Rm 11:10	
Fallen from salvation. Rm 11:11, 12	
Has failed. Rm 11:12	
Rejected. Rm 11:15	Accepted. Rm 11:15
Branches that are broken off. Rm 11:17	Holy branches. Rm 11:16
Broken off for unbelief. Rm 11:20	
Natural branches that are not spared. Rm 11:21	
Know the severity of God. Rm 11:22	Know the goodness of God. Rm 11:22
	All spiritual Israel will be saved. Rm 11:26
	God takes away their sins. Rm 11:27
Enemies of God. Rm 11:28	Beloved. Rm 11:27
Disobedient. Rm 11:30, 31, 32	Have obtained mercy. Rm 11:30, 31, 32

This makes Paul's argument easy to understand. There are two applications of the word 'Israel', one natural, fleshly and reprobate; the other having faith and being elected finds mercy. Unless you distinguish these two Israels you are left with a series of hopeless contradictions where Paul speaks a series of absurdities throughout a whole chapter.

The causes of Israel's rejection in Romans 9-11

It is these symptoms which are highlighted by Paul to serve as a warning to the church.

Reference	Problem
Rm 9:6-8	Trusting in natural descent from Abraham for salvation instead of having faith.

Rm 9:16	Trusting in human strength instead of having faith.
Rom 9:31-33	Seeking righteousness by human works not faith.
Rm 10:2-3	Have zeal but no knowledge about righteousness.
Rm 10:3	Seek their own natural righteousness instead of submitting to God.
Rm 10:16	They did not obey the Gospel.
Rm 10:21	They are a disobedient and contrary people.
Rm 11:3	They killed God's prophets and tore down his altars.
Rm 11:7	Israel has not obtained what it sought (salvation).
Rm 11:7	Israel is blinded to the Gospel as part of God's severe judgment.
Rm 11:8	God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear.
Rm 11:9	Their table became a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.
Rm 11:10	Their eyes are darkened, so that they do not see, and their back bowed down always.
Rm 11:11-12	They have fallen.
Rm 11:15	They are cast away.
Rm 11:17, 19	They are branches broken off.
Rm 11:21	They are not spared.
Rm 11:22	They are under God's severity.
Rm 11:23	Most are in unbelief.
Rm 11:28	They are enemies of the Gospel (and God).
Rm 11:30, 31, 32	They are disobedient.

It should give pause for thought that Paul quotes David in Romans 11:9-10 applying it to Israel and the Jews. However, in the psalm it comes from (Psalm 69:22-23) David applies this to his enemies who persecuted him (Ps 69:18, 19, 26). Indeed, these people are lumped with those who crucified Jesus (Ps 69:21). David prays for condemnation upon them, 'Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their dwelling place be desolate; Let no one live in their tents. For they persecute the ones you have struck, and talk of the grief of those you have wounded. Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous,' (Ps 69:24-28). Notice this: the enemies of David, upon whom he calls for judgment, are equated by Paul with the Jews who persecuted the church, with Israel in unbelief.

How contrary is the modern Jewish Root teaching that God loves national Israel and blesses her, even when she persecutes the church. This is a deceptive heresy.

The question of the root

16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.

17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

The root of the church is God's calling out of the Genesis patriarchs (i.e. the first elect people were the fathers). This is chiefly Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but especially Abraham, the first person called out of paganism and already mentioned in v1.⁸ Abraham is said to be the rock from which we are cut (Isa 51:1-2), he is the model of faith and is the key root in mind here (Rm 9:7-8). However, it is not physical descendants that Paul has in mind; in fact he says clearly that the root is Abraham as a model of faith and election.

Paul explained this doctrinally in Rm 4, and now does so by example. Abraham is scripture's origin point for teaching on the descendants of the covenant and promise. The

⁸ Israel did not actually exist as a nation at this point in Genesis, but becomes a nation in Exodus 12.

Gospel promise was made to Abraham, the covenant that arose from this promise was made with Abraham and Abraham also saw Christ just as Paul did (Jn 8:56).

When Paul talks about being a true Israelite he calls himself a 'descendant of Abraham' (Rm 11:1). True Jews (believers) are descended from him via the child of promise (Isaac as an elect believer, Rm 9:6-7; Gal 4:28). Abraham's real seed is Christ, hence all believers in Christ are spiritually descended from Abraham (Rm 9:8; Gal 3:26).

Abraham is the starting point for God's promise of blessed descendants from all nations (Gen 12:2-3). Through him the whole lump is holy,⁹ that is, consecrated to God's use.¹⁰ He is the root set apart (made holy) by God when he called him out of Ur. Abraham was separated from the rest of the world to be the father (root) of the people of God. In Abraham all the nations of the world were to be blessed.

Israel is not the root, Israel is the branches. Israel as a nation came much later.¹¹ The root is not even an Israelite, but a Sumerian (Chaldean), as Stephen made clear (Acts 7:2-4).

Conclusion

National Israel is not the root; either in Paul's illustration in Romans 11 or of the church.

The question of the branches

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree? ... blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. Rm 11:24-26

The consecration of the root ensures the consecration of the whole tree. This means that unholy branches will be removed. The natural branches are Jews, the wild olive branches are Gentiles. Some branches (in fact the majority of Israelites so far, since only a remnant is left, Rm 11:5-7) were broken off from being a true descendant of Abraham because they did not have faith (therefore, were not elect). It is faith which keeps the branches on the tree. Lack of faith cuts off natural branches (Jews) and possessing faith grafts on wild olive branches (Gentiles, Rm 11:17ff).

The source of life for both branches is the root which supplies sap (fatness v17, the life of Christ). The root that supports us is faith and obedience to God's call, modelled by Abraham. Paul spent a whole chapter explaining this root of faith earlier in his letter (c4). The root could be considered either as Abraham or the faith of Abraham, but not Israel as a nation, which did not exist at that time. Abraham was, in fact, the father of the Ishmaelites as well as the Israelites. Paul's point is to refer to Abraham as the father of faith, not ethnic qualities. He does exactly the same thing in Galatians. Ethnic Israel does not support the church now, yet this root does (Rm 11:18). In fact Paul says that ethnic Israel is the enemy of the church at the moment (Rm 11:28).

Paul has made great pains to explain that the Gentile church has been grafted in to this olive tree; the branches of the tree are the ones saved, the church, which included Jews and

⁹ Paul has in mind the law of first fruits (Lev 23:10-11; Num 15:19-21). The offering of a freshly reaped sheaf and the first cakes of dough consecrated the whole harvest to God.

¹⁰ C.f. 1 Cor 7:14 where believer's children are dedicated to God.

¹¹ This is not an obscure interpretation; the vast majority of historic commentators agree with this line. It can be read no other way. The *Amplified Bible* even puts 'Abraham' in brackets after the word 'root'. A few ancient commentators see the root as Christ, but this is not the natural reading of the text. Only Dispensational commentators disagree.

Gentiles, and then Paul calls this tree 'Israel' in symbolic terms. The tree that is the saved people with faith, the elect, are all 'Israel'.

Paul keeps interchanging between natural branches and wild branches, between natural Israel and spiritual Israel. The blindness affects natural Israel, the 'all Israel' is all the elect. Paul has already stated clearly that not all natural Israel will be saved, but only a remnant (Rm 9:27) so when he says 'all Israel will be saved' he is referring to the full number of the elect.

All Israel

A minor question is: does this term mean all elect Jews or all elect believers (Jews and Gentiles). I say this is a minor point since the argument regards election, per se, so both imply each other. Most major Reformed commentators, such as Calvin, see the whole church mentioned here. I have been inclined to this. However, Paul's particular argument in Rm 11 has been about Israel itself being an illustration of election. It is logical to think, therefore, that he means elect Israel alone. However, this is a small point not worth arguing about. The chief issue is that it refers to elect people not natural Israel.

A millennium revival?

Verse 26 does not say, 'then all Israel shall be saved', as if it is after the fulness of the Gentiles has been brought in. The adverb 'so' in, 'and so all Israel will be saved', regards manner; a way of doing things. There is no implication whatsoever of a millennial kingdom after the time of the Gentiles has finished. 'So' is an adverb of manner, not of time, and means that all Israel (all the elect) are saved in the same manner, by faith.

Paul has spent considerable time explaining that there is only a remnant of Israel saved even in this chapter alone. He says nothing about a hope for the salvation of 'all Israel' in the flesh at any time, rather he shows continually that Israel is the enemy of Christ and the Gospel (Rm 11:28). He warns Gospel preachers to beware of Jewish opposition, whom he calls dogs' (Phil 3:2). Paul's concern is 'to save some' (Rm 11:14). It is impossible to prove that Paul teaches a future national conversion of Israel. In fact, Paul interprets OT prophecy to show clearly that only a small remnant will be saved (Rm 9:25-33, 10:16-21).

Not natural Israel

If it is insisted that the root is Israel, then Abraham's descendants must be seen as ethnic only, not those of faith (contrary to the NT). But, this must include Arabs who are also ethnic descendants of Abraham. If one tries to avoid this pitfall by saying that it is only descendants through Isaac, then we are taking the line of faith, which, as Paul insists, includes all Christians. But the root cannot be the whole tree (Paul says that Israel are branches). There is no other conclusion. The root is Abraham, not national Israel.

Branches are not the root. Paul's explains that the branches are the elect, both believing Jews (natural branches) and elect Gentiles (grafted in branches). These together comprise the church. ['All Israel' can mean either all the elect (Jew and Gentile) or all the elect Israelites.] Thus Israel cannot be the branches and the root, something claimed by some Jewish Root teachers.

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