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*“Provoked to Jealousy, Provoked to Life”*

ROMANS 11:11-15

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## AT A GLANCE

Paul was unapologetically taking the gospel to the Gentile world. But had he forgotten about the Jews? Were they abandoned? Not at all! Paul went to the Gentiles in hopes that doing so would cause some of his Jewish kinsmen to want the blessings of God that they received and in turn, would come to Jesus in faith and repentance.

## ROMANS 11:11-15

**<sup>11</sup> So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! <sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?**

## WILL ISRAEL FALL FOREVER?

**Verse 11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!** Once again Paul asks a rhetorical question in order to reject it in the strongest terms. He sheds light on the Psalm he quoted in verses 9 and 10, explaining that their stumbling opened the door for the promised blessing to be expanded beyond the nation of Israel, just as God promised Abraham, saying, *“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 12:3*

Usually when we stumble, we **fall**. When we fall, especially say on a precarious mountain path, we do not always get back up. The Jews have stumbled over the stumbling stone, Jesus Christ, which begs the question, “Will they fall away forever?”

## THEIR TRESPASS, OUR SALVATION

**By no means?** The ultimate end of Israel is not a falling away. The sovereign Lord has another point to their stumbling. Paul expounds in the rest of **verse 11, Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.**

In God’s sovereignty, their stumble, or **their trespass**, has led to the salvation of the Gentiles. **Salvation has come to the Gentiles** specifically because the Jews rejected it. They’ve pushed the gospel out beyond the Jewish world.

Tragically, the people for whom the Kingdom of God was intended and to whom the Law and the prophets and the promises were delivered, will be cast out while those who had no claim to the Kingdom will be welcomed in.

Upon healing the centurion's servant in Capernaum, Jesus said to the people, *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Matthew 8:11-12

Jesus also said to the religious leaders, *"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."* Matthew 21:43 They understood what He was saying and hated Him for it.

While Paul always went first to the Jews in a city, when he was rejected, he would turn to the Gentiles. Luke records one such instance in Corinth, *"When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" Acts 18:6*

Listen to the final recorded words of Paul to the Jews in Rome, written in Acts 28. Paul said, *"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." Acts 28:25-28*

How ironic that he spoke to their faces in Acts 28 what he quoted about them in years earlier in Romans 11:8; they had eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear. Isaiah and Moses testify against that faithless generation. Paul would go to the Gentiles, but he didn't write the Jews off completely.

## TO MAKE ISRAEL JEALOUS

The reason Paul says **salvation has come to the Gentiles, is to make Israel jealous.** This statement represents a grand reversal in the order of salvation. That the Jews would be made jealous because of something the Gentiles had, that is surprising, especially to a Jew.

The Jews were the chosen people of God, offspring of Abraham. If ever there were people entitled to God's blessings, it would be them. And yet what we see here is that it is they who are now on the outside looking in with jealousy. The blessings of God once enjoyed by the Jews are now being extended to Gentiles and withheld from the Jews as a clear message that God's blessings are not entitled, but given as a gift of grace.

And Paul sees this as God's purpose and plan not only for Gentiles, but also for Jews. For Paul, evangelizing the Gentile world was not merely an end, but also the means to an end – namely the restoration of Israel to the Kingdom.

## HOW MUCH MORE!

**Verse 12 says Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!** Because Israel stumbled over Jesus, **the world** is blessed, **Gentiles** are blessed. For one, the blessing to the Gentiles is specifically the salvation afforded to us through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which came through Israel's **stumble**, their **trespass**.

But just as with the story of Joseph, we can see that what man meant for evil, God uses for good! Without their trespass, we would still be under the Law and Gentiles would still be cut off. If God uses their trespass to bless the world with riches of eternal inheritance in Christ, **how much more will their full inclusion mean!**

Right now, there is a partial acceptance among the Jews. Some Jews believe, but most do not. We'll see in 11:25 that there is a partial hardening of the Jews until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. What can we expect when that partial hardening is lifted and all Israel is saved?! (11:26) Zechariah speaks of that day in chapter 12 and the effect of that day on the rest of the world in chapter 14.

*“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn...” Zechariah 12:10*

Zechariah is looking down the timeline of history several thousand years and he sees a day in which the house of David, that is Israel, will be given a spirit of grace, and pleas for mercy, that is, repentance. They will “look on me,” God, “on Him whom they have pierced.” Who is this? Who is the pierced God? Jesus Christ our Lord!

Zechariah speaks of a day in which the blinders will be lifted from their eyes and they will see Jesus, God in the flesh, whom they pierced and they will cry for mercy and they will mourn like a parent who loses an only child and they will weep bitterly. Israel will repent when they see Jesus. And then something spectacular will happen.

*“Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths.” Zechariah 14:16*

After God pours out His spirit of grace on Israel and Israel is saved (Zechariah 12) there's going to be a conflict involving many nations coming against Jerusalem. But the Lord God will make Israel an “immovable rock.” He will defend them and survivors of those other nations will go up to Jerusalem year after year to worship King Jesus.

How much more blessed will the world be, how much more riches will it mean for the Gentiles when Israel is saved? You think God is finished with Israel? I don't think so. I think God *finishes* with Israel. I think Zechariah and Paul are describing the final days of apostasy on the earth. I think they're both seeing the end of faithlessness and the beginning of Jesus' reign over the earth. We'll return to that idea in verse 15.

## PROVOKED TO JEALOUSY, PROVOKED TO LIFE

For now, let's read **verses 13-14** in which Paul focuses his attention on Gentiles, **Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry<sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.**

Paul's concern regarding the Jews is that they would be saved. He told us in no uncertain terms in 9:1-3 and reiterated it in 10:1 that he longs for the salvation of Israel. He said he'd even wish that he could be trade places with them, give up his salvation that they would be saved. Nevertheless, Paul was uniquely called to be **an apostle to the Gentiles**. *“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Ephesians 3:8*

However, it appears Paul was concerned that Gentiles were growing judgmental of Jews. He issued a stern rebuke to arrogant Gentiles in the verses that follow here in Romans 11. He wanted Gentile believers, which includes you and me now, to know the purpose of his ministry among them is not to exclude Israel, but to restore Israel by provoking them to jealousy, thus provoking them to life.

His goal to **magnify** his **ministry** to the **Gentiles**, which I take to mean being as effective and faithful and as unapologetic as possible in taking the gospel as far as possible into the Gentile world, he said was to **make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.**

His aim was not to leave the Jews behind. It was not to condemn them, but rather to **save some of them**. If Jews would see the evidence of Christ among the Gentiles, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the blessing of God on their lives, maybe some of them would also turn to Christ.

John MacArthur summarizes like this, "As Jews see the Lord pour out the kind of blessings on the Gentile church that once were reserved for Israel, some of them desire that blessing for themselves and come to Jesus Christ, their spurned Messiah, in repentance and faith." In the words of F.F. Bruce, Jealous Jews might ask, "Why should the Gentiles have all the blessings?"

## LIFE FROM THE DEAD

**Verse 15 says For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?**

What does Paul mean when he says, **their rejection**? In Romans 11:1 Paul asks the rhetorical question, "has God rejected His people?" "By no means," he exclaims! Now in verse 15 he refers to their rejection. Scholars debate this, but I think Paul is saying, "If the way Israel treated Jesus, that is their **rejection** of Him and crucifixion, if that **means reconciliation of the world**, then in their full acceptance of Christ, we will see **life from the dead**."

There is also debate over what Paul means by this phrase, **life from the dead**. Some scholars argue it is proverbial and take the position that when Israel is saved, they will be a "tonic to the nations" to use Kent Hughes expression. He says the difference between non-believing Israel and believing Israel, in terms of its impact on the spread of the gospel will be as different as life and death. Faithful Israel will become a blessing to the nations because they will preach the Gospel and draw many to faith.

This does seem to resonate with Zechariah 14, which suggests that after Israel is saved through the ultimate conflict in the last days, survivors of the battle will come from all nations and worship. What's implied there? Those who at one point sought Israel's destruction will, after Israel's salvation, be drawn in to worship the Lord.

Thomas Schreiner, on the other hand, says, "Most scholars, however, rightly understand the phrase 'life from the dead' to refer to the physical resurrection of the dead. That is, the salvation of all Israel will be the climax of this age and will be followed by the resurrection." That is to say, when the full number of Gentiles has come in and all Israel is saved, we're going to see **life from the dead** - the resurrection.

Paul does say in verses 25 and 26 that the salvation of the Jews will follow the final salvation of the Gentiles, which causes me to wonder about who might be left to be saved once Israel is saved. When the last unbelieving Gentile is saved (v. 25), Israel will be saved (v. 26). What else is there? Who else is going to come to faith? I think **life from the dead** refers to the resurrection. The end.

That's what it's all building up to. The law and the prophets pointed forward to Christ. The Gospels reveal who Christ is. The Holy Spirit comes and leads Jew and Gentile to faith in Christ. Most Jews reject Him, many Gentiles accept Him. The Jews will eventually recognize Him as Messiah and be saved. The end of the world. Life from the dead. New Heaven, new earth. Praise the Lord, come Lord Jesus.

That's how I see it. You might disagree. Regardless, in the end, Jesus wins and you and I get eternal life with Him and with everyone, Jew and Gentile, who trusted in Him for salvation. Amen?!

But as we consider this passage with Paul's message of the significance of his ministry among Gentiles and he ties it directly to the ultimate purpose of provoking Jews to jealousy in hopes that

some of them will be saved now, even while we await the day in which all Israel will be saved, what implication does this have on our lives today?

### **MORE THAN THEOLOGY**

Regardless of where your eschatology lands there's a claim on your life in this passage. Here's the claim: if the Apostle Paul recognized his ministry among the nations was supposed to provoke Jews to jealousy to provoke them to life, what do you think the Lord would have you do with your faith in this world?

You are a Christian because the Jews rejected Christ and Paul, and the Gospel of salvation came to you, a Gentile. You've benefited from Israel's rejection. The least you can do is live such lives of faith, hope, love, and joy, and be so full of Christ and walk by the Spirit of God in sweet fellowship that not only the Gentile world around you, but the Jewish world around you would be provoked to jealousy.

I mean that they would see your life, so full of grace and love and blessing of the Lord, that they would earnestly desire to have what you have. Clearly, Paul recognized there is power in a life transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. People all around us should see in our character and in our countenance something that provokes them not only to jealousy, but provokes them also to life.

Jesus, help us provoke people to life! Amen?

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