GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL IN ROMANS 9–11

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PM 8260-I: Current Theological Issues

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October 17, 2026

Introduction

Romans 9–11 addresses the apparent tension between Israel's widespread rejection of the gospel and God's promises to Israel. I argue that "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 most plausibly refers to ethnic Israel corporately and that Paul anticipates a future, widespread turning of the Jewish people to faith in Christ. This reading draws on Paul's distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, his image of natural branches being grafted into their own olive tree again, and his references to Israel's "fullness" and "acceptance" (Rom. 11:12, 15, 23–26). By "corporately," I mean a widespread response among the Jewish people, not the salvation of every Jewish individual. Jewish people are also coming to faith through present gospel proclamation; the disputed question is whether this response will culminate in a future corporate turning. In either case, salvation is through Christ, not ancestry.

As a theological framework, I adopt traditional dispensationalism, which understands the church age as a parenthetical interlude in God's dealings with Israel. This paper does not seek to establish every element of that system or to resolve every territorial or political question. In particular, Romans 11 alone does not establish that the modern State of Israel fulfills every biblical promise; that claim requires a separate argument from the relevant covenantal and prophetic texts.

Theological traditions differ over how God fulfills his promises to Israel. Covenant theology often emphasizes their fulfillment in Christ and the unity of God's people. Progressive covenantalism likewise centers fulfillment in Christ while maintaining that the church is not simply a replacement for Israel. Progressive dispensationalism anticipates a future corporate role for Israel within a unified plan of salvation, while traditional dispensationalism draws a sharper distinction between Israel and the church. These positions should not be reduced to caricatures:

they can affirm together that Jewish people are saved through Christ while differing over Israel's corporate future and the church's relationship to Israel's promises.[1]

God's faithfulness and the present remnant

Israel's widespread unbelief raises the question of whether God's word has failed. Israel had received the covenants and promises (Rom. 9:4–5), yet many Israelites rejected the Messiah. Paul answers directly: "It is not as though the word of God has failed" (Rom. 9:6, English Standard Version). As Stott explains, physical descent from Jacob does not mean that every descendant inherits the promise. Paul's examples of Isaac and Ishmael, and of Jacob and Esau, show that God's promise has always depended on his purpose and calling, not genealogy alone (Rom. 9:7–13).[2]

Goodrich offers a helpful historical comparison for understanding Paul's defense of God's faithfulness. Tobit 14:3–7 presents Israel's history in stages—exile, partial restoration, and future restoration—illustrating a Jewish context in which present hardship did not necessarily signify the failure of God's promises. This parallel helps situate Paul's argument within broader Jewish reflection on Israel's history; it does not, by itself, show that Paul directly depended on Tobit.[3]

Paul returns to the question of Israel's status in Romans 11: "Has God rejected his people?" His answer is emphatic: "By no means!" (Rom. 11:1). Paul points first to himself, an Israelite who believes in Christ, and then to the remnant preserved by grace. Elijah's experience

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[1] Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 255.

[2] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 266–67.

[3] John K. Goodrich, "The Word of God Has Not Failed: God's Faithfulness and Israel's Salvation in Tobit 14:3–7 and Romans 9–11," *Tyndale Bulletin* 67, no. 1 (2016): 53–55, 57–59.

provides a precedent: when the prophet believed he stood alone, God had preserved seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. Israel's widespread apostasy, then, did not mean that every Israelite had rejected God. In Paul's day, the remnant existed by grace, not by works (Rom. 11:2–6).[4]

Although baptism is not the subject of Romans 9–11, Calvin's discussion helps clarify the distinction between covenant privilege and individual salvation. Jewish descent gave Israel historical priority as the first and native heirs of the gospel, but ancestry did not guarantee salvation. Calvin describes Israel's loss of privilege through unbelief and covenant-breaking, while Gentile believers are incorporated into Abraham's family rather than inheriting by physical descent. In both cases, salvation depends on divine mercy, not genealogy alone.[5]

Calvin's account does not, however, require the conclusion that God has abandoned the Jewish people. He maintains that God's promise continues to have significance for Israel and that God's gifts and calling remain irrevocable, even though individuals who reject the gospel do not receive its saving benefits. This distinction between God's continuing purpose and automatic individual salvation complements Paul's discussion of the remnant and the natural branches (Rom. 11:5, 17–23, 28–29). It also complicates a simple replacement claim: Gentiles are brought into the promise through faith, but their inclusion does not make them superior to Jewish people or erase Israel from the story. Calvin's discussion illuminates covenant continuity, though it does not by itself establish the timing or scale of a future corporate turning of Israel.[6]

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[4] Stott, *Message of Romans*, 292–93.

[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3:363–64, bk. 4, chap. 16, §§14–15.

[6] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:363–64, bk. 4, chap. 16, secs. 14–15.

Salvation through Christ and Gospel proclamation

Paul's concern for Israel's salvation is rooted in genuine love: he prays for them to be saved (Rom. 10:1). Their zeal, however, is not guided by a true understanding of God's righteousness. Seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness (Rom. 10:2–3). Paul then declares that Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4). Ancestry does not provide a separate way of salvation: the same Lord is Lord of both Jew and Gentile, and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:12–13).

Paul connects calling on the Lord with believing, hearing, and the proclamation of the gospel (Rom. 10:14–17). Calvin's account of preaching as God's ordinary means of producing faith helps illuminate Paul's missionary urgency, without implying that God is unable to work otherwise. The central point of the passage is that Jews and Gentiles alike need the gospel and are saved through faith in Christ—not through ancestry or self-righteousness.[7]

Israel's fullness and the olive tree

Paul asks whether Israel has stumbled beyond recovery and answers, "By no means!" (Rom. 11:11). Israel's present unbelief is not the end of Paul's argument. He describes a sequence in which Israel's trespass brings salvation to the Gentiles, Gentile inclusion provokes Israel to jealousy, and Israel's "fullness" and "acceptance" bring further blessing to the world (Rom. 11:11–16). Stott reads these verses as pointing beyond the present remnant to a fuller future mercy for Israel.[8]

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[7] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010), 386, 397–404.

[8] Stott, *Message of Romans*, 294–95, 303.

Himes develops the implications of Paul's "how much more" language in verses 12 and 15. He argues that Israel's restored vocation will bring further blessing to the Gentiles, and that "life from the dead" refers to an intensified Gentile harvest rather than simply the general resurrection. This proposal highlights the outward-reaching effects of Israel's restoration, but it is an interpretation of Paul's imagery, not a necessary conclusion of this paper. The argument here draws on its missional insight without adopting Himes's more specific eschatological account.[9]

Paul's olive-tree image explains both Gentile inclusion and the possibility of Israel's restoration (Rom. 11:17–24). The cultivated tree is rooted in the patriarchs; some natural branches have been broken off because of unbelief, while Gentile believers, like wild shoots, have been grafted in to share the root's nourishment. Paul warns Gentile believers not to boast: they do not support the root; the root supports them. Their standing depends on faith, not superiority. The image also preserves the possibility of restoration: the natural branches can be grafted in again if they do not continue in unbelief.[10]

Paul then discloses a "mystery": a partial hardening has come upon Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in," and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25–26). Stott argues that "Israel" in verse 26 retains the ethnic sense it has in verse 25, where Paul distinguishes Israel from the Gentiles. On this reading, "all Israel" refers corporately to the Jewish people, encompassing the present remnant and anticipating a future, widespread turning—not the salvation of every Jewish individual. The salvation in view is forgiveness through the Deliverer; Jews and Gentiles alike are saved through Christ.[11]

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[9] Paul A. Himes, "Israel and Her Vocation: The Fourth Stage of Romans 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176, no. 701 (2019): 41–48.

[10] Stott, *Message of Romans*, 299–302.

[11] Stott, *Message of Romans*, 302–4.

Several interpreters support this corporate, ethnic reading while differing over how and when the turning occurs. Moo distinguishes Israel from the Gentiles and expects a significant fulfillment at Christ's return. Schreiner emphasizes the consistent ethnic referent in Romans 11:25–26 and relates Israel's salvation to the Gentile fullness. Keener favors a turning stimulated by the Gentile mission before Christ's return. Eastman, by contrast, anticipates a direct revelation of Christ, likely at his return. Their disagreement is significant: identifying "Israel" ethnically does not by itself settle the timing or means of its future salvation.[12]

Beale connects Paul's language of mystery and Israel's rejection with prophetic patterns in Isaiah. Arif reads Romans 11:26–27 alongside Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9, connecting Israel's salvation with the removal of ungodliness and sin. Arif's further argument for territorial restoration is distinct from the more limited claim made here.[13] Witherington and Hyatt, Brown and Twist, Sproul, and Maitland likewise discuss a future corporate restoration or reconciliation of Israel. Their interpretations reinforce the contextual reading, but the case for this paper's thesis rests on Paul's argument rather than the number of interpreters who share it.[14]

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[12] D. J. Moo, "Romans," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 296; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 82–83, 478; Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 136–38; Susan Grove Eastman, "Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11," *New Testament Studies* 56, no. 3 (2010): 381–85, 391–94.

[13] G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 222–23; Cherif Arif, "The Isaianic Influence on Paul's Understanding of Israel's Salvation and Restoration in Romans 11:26–27," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2025): 102–8.

[14] Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 243–44, 249; Derek R. Brown and E. Tod Twist, Romans, ed. Douglas Mangum, Logos Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2026), commentary on Rom. 11:25–36; R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 190–93; Kent T. Maitland, "The Reconciliation of Future Israel in Romans 9–11," *Eleutheria* 6, no. 1 (2022): 145–55.

Israel's continuing election and the mercy of God

In Romans 11:28, Paul describes Israel as both "enemies" with respect to the gospel and "beloved" with respect to election. Stott understands these descriptions as referring to different aspects of Israel's situation: many Jews oppose the gospel, yet God's election and promises to the patriarchs remain significant. Waymeyer similarly distinguishes corporate election from individual salvation. Paul's description of Israel as beloved does not mean that individuals who reject Christ are thereby saved.[15]

Achtemeier emphasizes the merciful purpose within Paul's account of Israel's hardening: mercy has come to the Gentiles and, ultimately, Israel is also encompassed by God's mercy. Romans 11:32 summarizes this movement, presenting disobedience as the setting in which God shows mercy to both groups. Achtemeier's discussion here does not define "all Israel" or establish a precise timetable. Its contribution is theological: Israel's hardening should not be treated as proof that God has abandoned the people. Paul's final disclosure of God's purpose calls for humility, not certainty about details the passage leaves unresolved.[16]

Competing interpretations

Hendriksen considers several interpretations of "all Israel." He rejects the view that the phrase predicts a large-scale end-time conversion of ethnic Jews, arguing that *houtōs* means "in this manner," rather than "then," and that the remnant theme governs the passage. He therefore

[15] Stott, *Message of Romans*, 305–6; Matt Waymeyer, "The Dual Status of Israel in Romans 11:28," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 61–62, 69–71.

[16] Paul J. Achtemeier, Romans, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 188.

understands “all Israel” as the full number of elect Jews gathered throughout history—the sum of successive remnants.[17]

The disagreement also concerns Romans 11:28. Hendriksen understands “enemies” and “beloved” as descriptions of elect Jews at successive stages: they are hostile to the gospel before conversion and become friends when they receive mercy. Waymeyer, by contrast, reads the descriptions simultaneously, applying them to ethnic Israel from different perspectives. On his reading, Israel remains beloved on account of election and the patriarchal promises even while many Israelites oppose the gospel. The contrast turns on whether Paul describes two simultaneous relationships or successive stages in the experience of the elect.[18]

Zoccali offers a sharper challenge. He argues that “until” in Romans 11:25 can mark the period of Gentile salvation and the present outworking of Israel’s salvation without requiring a later reversal of hardening. He also reads “and so” in verse 26 as describing the manner, rather than the timing, of Israel’s salvation. On this reading, “all Israel” is the total number of elect Jews throughout Israel’s history, saved through the ongoing gospel mission, rather than a prediction of a future mass conversion.[19]

Gentry and Wellum’s progressive-covenantal account locates the fulfillment of the promises in Christ and the church’s union with him: Gentiles share Israel’s inheritance as members of the covenant community, not as replacements for Israel. Wellum denies, however, that the church is directly identified as “the new Israel.” Fitzmyer also emphasizes God’s faithfulness to Israel and understands “all Israel” ethnically across generations, while

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[17] William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 379–85.

[18] Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 384; Waymeyer, “Dual Status,” 64–66.

[19] Christopher Zoccali, “‘And so All Israel Will Be Saved’: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 3 (2008): 303–9, 313–14.

acknowledging that Paul does not fully explain the future salvation of Jewish people. Fitzmyer's reading supports an ethnic referent for "Israel" but does not establish every detail of the future-conversion position defended here.[20]

Other commentators support a future corporate salvation of ethnic Israel but differ on its timing and sequence. Benware argues that national election must be distinguished from individual salvation: God's purposes for ethnic Israel remain, though not every Jewish person is saved. Harvey's account of supersessionism summarizes the contrasting claim that the church fulfills or replaces Israel in covenantal terms. Ladd likewise expects ethnic Israel's future salvation through faith in Jesus, while leaving its details open. Hoyt's response highlights the role of hermeneutical assumptions in disputes about Israel's future.[21]

Ticciati challenges a simple binary between ethnic Israel and the church. Her reading of Romans 9–11 presents one Israel that includes Christ-believing Gentiles but does not exclude non-Christ-believing Jews from Israel's identity or election. This inclusion should not be confused with the claim that unbelieving individuals are already saved: Paul still speaks of branches needing to be grafted in through faith. Ticciati challenges replacement readings while complicating a straightforward prediction of a distinct future national event.[22]

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[20] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 229; Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and New Covenant Theology," The Gospel Coalition, accessed October 15, 2026, section "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship across Redemptive-History"; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 623.

[21] Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 103–5, 118; T. Harvey, "Supersessionism," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al. (London and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 879; George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1977), 27–29; Herman A. Hoyt, "A Dispensational Premillennial Response," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1977), 41–43.

[22] Susannah Ticciati, "The Future of Biblical Israel: How Should Christians Read Romans 9–11 Today?" *Biblical Interpretation* 25, nos. 4–5 (2017): 497–518; accepted manuscript, PDF pp. 13–18, 23–24.

Compton's two essays offer a related but distinct position. He argues that Israel's promises are fulfilled by Israel within the church: Christ is true Israel, and believing Jews and Gentiles inherit the promises in him. In Romans 11, he describes Jewish salvation as a progressive reversal of hardening during the present Gentile mission, with corporate completion associated with Christ's return. He allows that a separate, climactic final conversion may occur but does not regard it as certain. This view preserves Israel's ethnic significance while locating salvation within the multiethnic church.[23]

Assessment of the interpretations

Zoccali's objection deserves a direct response. He is right that "until" alone does not prove a subsequent reversal: the word may mark the duration of a process without guaranteeing a separate event afterward. His reading also rightly emphasizes that Jewish people are being saved through the gospel in the present. Nevertheless, the sequence of partial hardening, Gentile fullness, Israel's "fullness" and "acceptance," and the regrafting of natural branches cumulatively supports—without conclusively establishing—a future corporate culmination. Its precise timing and whether it involves a distinct climactic event remain unsettled.[24]

I favor the future corporate reading for three related reasons. First, Paul continues to distinguish Israel from the Gentiles in Romans 11:25–26; continuity of reference is more natural than a sudden change. Second, Israel's "fullness" and "acceptance," considered alongside the regrafting of natural branches, point beyond the presence of a believing remnant in any one

[23] Jared Compton, "The Relationship between Israel and the Church," The Gospel Coalition, Concise Theology, accessed October 15, 2026, sections "Old Testament Promises of Israel's Salvation Are Fulfilled by Israel" and "Old Testament Promises of Israel's Salvation Are Fulfilled by Israel in the Church"; and "The Future of Ethnic Israel," The Gospel Coalition, Concise Theology, accessed October 15, 2026, sections "Israel's Corporate Salvation" and "Israel's Corporate Salvation, the Gentile Mission & the Parousia"; https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-relationship-between-israel-and-the-church/; https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-future-of-ethnic-israel/.

[24] Zoccali, "'And so All Israel Will Be Saved,'" 306–9.

period (Rom. 11:12, 15, 23–24). Third, I find Waymeyer's simultaneous reading of Israel's status more persuasive: Israel's position as "enemies" concerning the gospel and "beloved" concerning election supports a continuing corporate purpose without implying that unbelieving individuals are already saved (Rom. 11:28–29). Neither "until" nor "and so" settles the question independently. Taken together, however, Paul's contrasts, images, and promises make a future widespread turning to Christ more persuasive than identifying "all Israel" solely with the accumulated remnants of history.

Ministry implications

When teaching Romans 9–11, I will distinguish the questions the passage raises rather than collapsing them into a single debate over whether the church "replaces" Israel. Interpreters disagree about the meaning of "all Israel," the timing of Israel's salvation, and how Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ and the new-covenant community. I will represent these positions fairly: not every view that emphasizes fulfillment in Christ denies God's concern for Jewish people, and not every view that expects Israel's future salvation separates Jews and Gentiles into different ways of salvation. At the same time, I will stress that ethnic descent alone does not secure salvation and that Jewish branches are grafted in through faith, not unbelief (Rom. 9:6; 11:20–23).

For example, in a lesson on Romans 11:17–24, I would first ask learners to identify the root, the natural branches, and the grafted wild branches. Then I would ask what Paul commands Gentile believers to do and what grounds their standing in the tree. This approach connects interpretation with humility and faith. If a learner concluded that God had discarded the Jewish people, I would return to Paul's opening denial in Romans 11:1 and his warning against boasting in 11:18, explaining why present unbelief does not cancel the hope of mercy.

Paul's hope for Israel strengthens rather than postpones present evangelism and prayer. He expresses his desire for Israel's salvation (Rom. 10:1), describes his Gentile ministry as a means of provoking his fellow Jews to faith (Rom. 11:13–14), and holds out the possibility that branches now broken off may be grafted in again (Rom. 11:23). I should pray for Jewish people and share the gospel with them now, not treat their salvation as relevant only to the end times. The hope Paul offers is salvation through Christ, not a separate path based on ethnicity or covenant ancestry.

This concern is also personal. My stepfather, who has since passed away, was Jewish and came to faith in Christ as a boy. He led his mother, father, and sister to Christ; they, in turn, raised their children in the faith, and the testimony continued through later generations—a pattern that echoes 2 Timothy 2:2. His conversion reminds me that Jewish salvation is not only a question about the future; Jewish people are receiving Christ today. This family experience strengthens my commitment to pray and share the gospel while trusting God's faithfulness.

The olive-tree warning should shape the church's posture. Gentile believers must not boast over the branches: they do not support the root; the root supports them (Rom. 11:18). The branches stand by faith, and God is able to graft natural branches in again (Rom. 11:20–23). This corrects contempt toward Jewish people and the assumption that church membership or theological knowledge makes Christians spiritually superior. It should also govern Christian disagreement: I can argue for my reading of "all Israel" without caricaturing those who understand the passage differently. Carter's call to pray for Jewish and Gentile people and to disagree charitably reinforces this pastoral responsibility.[25]

[25] Paul Carter, "Does Anyone Actually Believe in Replacement Theology?" The Gospel Coalition Canada, October 18, 2017, paragraphs beginning "There are two main answers" and "God's ways are higher than our ways"; https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/anyone-actually-believe-replacement-theology/.

Finally, God's faithfulness gives assurance when visible responses to ministry are discouraging. Paul holds together grief over present unbelief and confidence that God has not abandoned his purposes; God's gifts and calling are irrevocable (Rom. 11:28–29). This does not authorize a promise that every individual will be saved or certainty about the timing of Israel's future. It does remind me that apparent resistance does not prove the gospel has failed. My responsibility is to teach faithfully, pray persistently, proclaim Christ to all, and entrust the results to God's mercy (Rom. 11:30–32).

Conclusion

Romans 9–11 presents Israel's unbelief as neither a failure of God's word nor a reason for Gentile pride. Paul grounds hope in God's faithfulness, the continuing remnant, the possibility that natural branches will be grafted back into their own tree, and the promise of mercy. The most plausible reading is that Paul anticipates a future corporate turning of ethnic Israel to Christ, even as Jewish people are being saved in the present. The precise timing and manner of this corporate turning remain disputed. Within the traditional dispensational framework adopted here[26], Gentiles share the blessing of salvation without displacing Israel's distinct corporate future; both Jews and Gentiles, however, are saved through Christ. This hope calls the church to humility toward Jewish people, confidence in God's faithfulness, and continued proclamation of salvation through Christ.

[26] Parker and Lucas, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 255.

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