

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

Paul's logic is clearly a *kal v'chomer* argument. Put simply, if God is able to graft into a cultivated olive tree branches that are not cultivated (i.e., wild), then certainly He is able to graft in branches that once were part of the original tree. Once again Paul shows us his understanding of the tree. It is the covenant made with Abraham, and it belongs to the descendents of the patriarchs. Paul has already stated this in 9:4—the covenants belong to Israel. Israel and Israel alone is the locus of God's covenant promises. Salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22). It is therefore entirely contrary to God's revealed plan of salvation to see it unfold apart from Israel. Always, and in every place, God's salvific work is done in connection with the covenants He made with the fathers. And these covenants are always worked out in connection with the nation known as Israel. Surely the covenant promise envisioned all nations, but never as separate from Israel. The blessing that was to come upon all the families of earth was a blessing tied inextricably to Israel.

This verse helps explain why it is, in one sense, wrong to speak of Jewish believers having undergone a "conversion," since such might imply being grafted into another tree (to use Paul's analogy). Paul's use of "by nature" and its opposing "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν, κατὰ φύσιν) makes this clear. When a Jewish person receives Yeshua as the true Messiah, from Paul's perspective he remains or is grafted into the tree of which he was already a part—it is a tree that is natural for him in the sense that it is his covenant. When a Gentile is grafted into the tree, he comes into a relationship which is contrary to his natural station in life, being "separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of (the) promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12).

This is not to imply that the Jewish person is in any less need of salvation than a Gentile. Quite the contrary. All are sinners, and all fall short of the glory of God, as Paul has shown in the opening chapters. But the point is this: the Jewish person, by the very fact that they are part of the people chosen by God from of old, have a *natural* connection with God in this world that the Gentile does not. While this is mysterious, and even mystical, it is nonetheless Paul's theology. And to lose sight of it is to overlook a key aspect of Paul's soteriology.

But the "bottom line" in all of this for Paul's immediate argument seems clear:

If the Gentile Christian can believe that God has actually grafted him into that holy stem to which he does not naturally belong, how much more readily ought he to believe that God is able and willing to do what is less wonderful—to restore to their own native stock the unbelieving Jews, when they repent and believe!³¹¹

25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Paul now proceeds to unfold a "mystery" (τὸ μυστήριον, *to musterion*) to the Gentiles (still his primary focus in this section) which consists of three successive stages of the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation. First, the unbelief of the majority of the nation of Israel, then (secondly) the ingathering of the Gentiles, and thirdly, the salvation of all Israel. This, at first blush, appears to reverse the order previously given: "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." This *ordo salutis* appears to conclude with the Gentiles, while Paul now teaches that the consummation will be when "all Israel" is saved. Thus Paul goes to considerable length to prove this from the Tanach.

In the opening line of this verse we are reminded of a very important principle: misunderstanding the Scriptures will inevitably lead to sin. Paul is fearful that the Gentiles' ignorance of this Scriptural teaching will result in their being arrogant, i.e., "wise in your own estimation."

Conversely, Paul is confident that if and when the Gentiles are properly taught the truth from the Scriptures, their tendency to arrogance will be overcome. Here we have a most excellent example of an enduring principle: the truth of God is the means by which the child of God walks a sanctified life. It is true that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1Cor 15:33) but it is also true that bad theology leads to transgression. And bad theology is overcome by a constant appeal to the Scriptures.

The concept of "mystery" is used by Paul, not as the mystery religions used the word in the sense of something kept secret from the uninitiated, but as something contained in the Tanach but now able to be applied since the coming of Yeshua. It is used by Paul 21 times and always in connection with the fulfillment of divine prophecy in the person of Messiah. While the prophets spoke, and the matter was known, the method by which the particular prophecy would be worked out in time remained, in measure, a mystery until the coming of Messiah. Thus, the word has strong apocalyptic associations (cf. Dan 2:18f, 27-30, 47; 1Enoch 51:3; 103:2; 104:10; 1QS 4:18; 1QpH 7:5, 8, 14). Paul, who himself received divine revelation (cf. Eph 3:3), does not indicate that what he is teaching is entirely unknown in the past. Indeed, his use of the Tanach argues for the fact that his teaching was known, at least to the remnant. Yet in the progress of revelation, and particularly in the unfolding of revelation through the person and work of Yeshua, those prophetic truths of the Tanach now take on new significance and application. It is this that Paul wishes to emphasize in the present context.

that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved... Our first question is how to understand the structure of this clause. Is it comprised of two statements, the latter being a conclusion? Or is it a sentence made up of three members, each contingent on the former?—a) partial hardening of Israel, b) which gives opportunity for the salvation of the Gentiles, and c) only after this will all of Israel be saved. Dividing it this way seems most natural.

We may also ask, then, what Paul wishes to stress. Is it the hardening of Israel, or the ingathering of the Gentiles, or that inevitably all Israel will be saved? Judging from the following quotes, it appears that Paul wishes to show the progression of salvation history, ending ultimately in Israel's salvation, and this in turn should cause the Gentiles to recognize their role in the whole matter, and anticipate Israel's redemption. This would thus lead to a humble attitude rather than an arrogant one.

Israel is responsible for her own failure to believe. Yet there is more to it than that. Her unbelief mysteriously is also part of God's overall plan, not only for her, but for all of the nations. It is therefore unwarranted for the Gentiles to judge her unnecessarily. As "joint heirs," the Gentiles must both anticipate and await the salvation of Israel, and even recognize their own salvation as a means to this end. Such a perspective will automatically discount becoming arrogant under the false premise that their salvation puts them in a superior position.

The term "until" (*ἄρχι ου*, *archi ou*) must carry a temporal force here, meaning that the partial hardening of Israel will continue until such time as the "fulness of the Gentiles has come in." While the term can mean "while" (cf. Heb 3:13), it seems hardly possible that it can have that meaning here. The Gentiles Paul addresses were confused over the unbelief of Israel and where this left her in terms of God's covenant promise. Thus Israel's coming to faith in Yeshua is not contemporary with the ingathering of the Gentiles, but subsequent to it.

To what exactly does the "fulness of the Gentiles" refer? It must mean the full number of the elect chosen from among all the nations. As more and more Gentiles come to faith in the Messiah, the complete number (known only to God) of the elect from the nations will be realized. Yet we should be careful not to make this a rigid arithmetic equation. Paul may be thinking here of general groups—that generally speaking the mass of Gentiles will come to faith in advance of the end-times revival of Israel. This should not be construed to teach that no Gentiles will be saved after the national awakening of Israel, but only that in the broad strokes the one

will precede the other.

Furthermore, the "fulness of the Gentiles" should also be understood against the backdrop of the proclamation of Yeshua as the One who "takes away the sins of the world." The whole concept of the "fulness of the Gentiles" envisions a majority of the nations, not merely a few. In the end, the victory of God is seen in that He redeems a host of people that no man can number from every tribe, kindred, and tongue. Thus the emphasis is as much on the idea of "fulness" as it is upon "Gentiles."

26-27 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

The connective "and so" is καὶ οὕτως (*kai houtos*) and means "and in this manner." While it can denote a consequential action (result of previous action), its primary emphasis is to describe the particular kind of action which causes the stated effect. We might paraphrase "and in this way all Israel will be saved." Paul once again emphasizes the fact that the salvation of the Gentiles is the means God will use to affect the salvation of Israel.

Much discussion has ensued about the exact meaning of "all Israel" (πᾶς Ἰσραήλ, *pas Israel*). The following comprise the primary suggestions:

- 1) that "Israel" here means all the elect, both Jews and Gentiles
- 2) that "Israel" here means all the elect of the Jews
- 3) that "Israel" here means the whole nation of Israel, including every individual (and some would extend this to every member in every generation)
- 4) that "Israel" here means the whole nation, but not necessarily including every individual member

Number one must be rejected out of hand, for the simple reason that hermeneutically there is no basis for understanding "Israel" differently in this verse than in the previous one. What is more, "Israel" and "Gentiles" are clearly contrasted throughout the context of vv. 11-32.

That number two should also be rejected seems clear from the simple fact that Paul would not need to affirm that the elect of Israel would be saved—he has made this clear throughout the extended context by his reference to the remnant. It is no surprise that the elect of Israel will be saved. What does seem to be overlooked by Paul's audience, however, is that the elect of Israel in the end-times will, in fact, comprise the whole nation.

Of the two remaining choices, number four is to be preferred as fitting the overall language of the Apostle and his message. Note the following parallels:

1Sam. 7:5 Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the LORD for you."

1Sam. 25:1 Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

1Kings 12:1 Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king.

2Chr. 12:1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD.

Dan. 9:11 "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.

Thus, the phrase “all of Israel” is well attested in the Tanach as referring to the nation as a whole, but not necessarily to every individual within the nation. The point Paul wishes to make is clear: presently the nation has rejected Messiah Yeshua (but not every individual within the nation), but there is coming a time when the nation as a whole (not necessarily every individual within the nation) will accept Him.

One wonders whether or not Paul had the rabbinic dictum in mind: “All Israel have a place in the world to come.”³¹² If he did, here he gives a direct answer to how this would become a reality. Not through mere ethnic status, but through an acceptance of Yeshua as the Messiah. That Paul uses the phrase “all Israel” cannot be overlooked in this regard. Here may be further proof that the issue of “all Israel” having an “automatic” place in the world to come was a well-known position, one against which Paul regularly gave challenge.

That Israel as a nation will experience a revival of faith as the means to her salvation is thus proven from the Tanach. The typical “Just as it is written” introduces a composite of Tanach texts: Isaiah 59:20-21a and Isaiah 27:9

MT	Lxx	Paul
<p>וְכָא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וְלִשְׁבֵי פְשַׁע בְּיַעֲקֹב נְאֻם יְהוָה וְאֲנִי זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה</p> <p>A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” declares the LORD. “As for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD...</p>	<p>καὶ ἦξει ἕνεκεν Σιων ὁ ῥυόμενος καὶ ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακωβ καὶ αὐτῇ αὐτοῖς ἢ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη εἶπεν κύριος</p> <p>And the deliverer shall come for Zion’s sake, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this shall be My covenant with them, said the Lord...</p>	<p>ἦξει ἐκ Σιὼν ὁ ῥυόμενος, ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ. καὶ αὐτῇ αὐτοῖς ἢ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη,</p> <p>The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungod- liness from Jacob. This is My cov- enant with them...</p>
<p>לְכֵן בְּזֹאת יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן יַעֲקֹב</p> <p>Therefore through this Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven...</p>	<p>διὰ τοῦτο ἀφαιρεθήσεται ἡ ἀνομία Ἰακωβ</p> <p>Therefore the lawlessness of Jacob will be taken away...</p>	<p>ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν.</p> <p>when I take away their sins.</p>

It is clear that Paul is quoting from the Lxx, though the Lxx is not substantially different than the Hebrew MT in terms of its translation.

Significant differences that may be noted:

- 1) MT: “come to Zion” / Lxx: “come for Zion” / Paul: “come from Zion”
- 2) MT: “to those who turn from transgression” / Lxx: “and will turn away ungodliness” / Paul: “He will remove ungodliness”

As to the first difference, the MT has the Redeemer coming to Zion, while the Lxx has Him coming “on behalf of” Zion (the Hebrew preposition ל could be understood this way), and Paul has Him coming out of Zion, i.e., Zion is the place of origin. However, these differences do not bear significantly upon the use of the text, for the simple reason that coming out of Zion does not preclude coming for Zion. Paul no doubt understood this to be the case because he is using this text to show that Yeshua’s work was for the sake of Israel as well, though currently her rejection of Yeshua clouds this issue. What is more, “coming out of Zion” may be midrashic on

Paul's part, owing to the fact that the rejected Yeshua would necessarily leave Zion in order to eventually redeem her. A subtle change of the preposition may signal just such a midrashic comment.³¹³

The second difference, however, appears substantial. The MT indicates that the Redeemer will come to those who have already turned from their transgressions, while the Lxx (followed by Paul) understands the text to teach that the Redeemer in His coming will cause transgression to be turned away from Zion. The issue lies in the understanding of וְלֹשְׁבֵי. The MT points it as a Qal masculine plural participle construct of שׁוּב (*shuv*), thus, “those who return from (their) transgressions.” That the verb שׁוּב (*shuv*) is the basis for the noun תְּשׁוּבָה (*teshuwah*), “repentance,” makes clear what Isaiah is saying: the Redeemer comes to Zion, but to a people who have turned from their waywardness back to the proper worship of their God.

This is how the Talmudic Sages understood the verse:

R. Jonathan said: Great is repentance, because it brings about redemption, as it is said “And a redeemer will come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.”³¹⁴

But the idea that the Messiah could come either to a generation marked by repentance or entirely engulfed in transgression is also found within the Rabbinic interpretations:

R. Johanan said: When you see a generation ever dwindling, hope for him [the Messiah], as it is written, And the afflicted people You will save. R. Johanan said: When You see a generation overwhelmed by many troubles as by a river, await him, as it is written, when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him; which is followed by, And the Redeemer shall come to Zion.

R. Johanan also said: The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked: ‘in a generation that is altogether righteous,’ as it is written, Your people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever. Or ‘altogether wicked,’— as it is written, And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; and it is [elsewhere] written, For My own sake, even for My own sake, will I do it.³¹⁵

It could be that Paul understood the very coming of the Messiah to be the catalyst for repentance so that when He enters the City He comes to those who have repented, but His coming is actually what has affected the heart change. This accords with Zechariah:

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zech. 12:10)

The following context of Zechariah fills out the picture:

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more,” declares the LORD Almighty. “I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land.” (Zech. 13:1–2)

Regardless of the exact ordering of events, the primary point in Paul's use of the quotes from Isaiah 59 and 27 is that the salvation of Israel is directly related to the return of Yeshua and the repentance granted Israel by God. Paul identifies Israel's current problem as that of sin, with

the solution being the forgiveness of sin through acceptance of atonement made secure by the Messiah's sacrifice. This is also the conclusion of Jeremiah's new covenant: "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:34). Such a perspective doubtlessly gave little hope to his contemporaries who thought the redemption of Israel would occur by the defeat of Rome. Based upon the words of the Prophets, Paul emphasizes that the future redemption of Israel is marked first by her salvation from sin, meaning her final acceptance of Yeshua as her true Messiah. The defeat of her enemies, restoration to the Land, and the re-establishment of the Temple are all blessings that flow from God's hand as a result of Israel's repentance.

28–29 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

The contrast presented by this verse is not exactly balanced. The "gospel" is put on one hand and "election" (or God's choice, but note that the word "God" is not in the original) on the other. Yet surely the "gospel" includes "election." It seems clear that the election spoken of here is national, not individual. It envisions the whole nation, not those chosen to eternal life within the nation (the remnant). Granted, the final end of God's purpose is that the two will be the same (the whole nation chosen for salvation) but the point is that no one knows for certain in what generation this will come to pass. The national election is thus significant and important for Paul's point here. Even though Israel as a nation presently are antagonistic toward the Gospel of Yeshua, they still remain God's chosen nation and are therefore beloved.

We must understand, then, that what Paul refers to here is the progress of the gospel in the course of world history. He looks at it from the position of what has happened as over against what will happen. Thus "from the standpoint of the gospel" must be understood as "from the standpoint of the course of the gospel as it has worked out to this point in time." Paul's current dilemma is that the elect nation has currently rejected Yeshua. They stand, for the present, as the "enemy" of the gospel because it is centered in Yeshua and the rejection by Israel has put them in the place of "wrath," being treated by God as enemy rather than as beloved.

Yet all of this in God's sovereign plan has worked out for the good of the Gentiles, as Paul has already shown. The cutting off of branches has eventuated in the grafting in of the Gentiles. Thus Israel, presently under the wrath of God because of her rejection of Messiah, are in this position "for your sake," that is, for the divine purpose of bringing in the Gentiles.

Yet if one is able to view the course of the gospel from an eternal perspective, a perspective given to us in the prophetic word of the covenant, then it is clear that the nation of Israel is "beloved," not on account of her own worthiness but because God is faithful to His own love. The promise made to the fathers, the very root of the olive tree, is sure and steadfast because it depends upon God and not upon the recipients of the covenant. God will, because of His elective love, have the victory. Israel will come to repentance and will espouse Yeshua as the Messiah. But this must be in the course of gospel history and cannot be forced by anyone nor by any movement. All of this will come to pass in God's timing and by His foreordained means.

The means by which Israel will come to faith, at least in one dimension, is one of Paul's emphases here. For the obedience of faith enjoined upon the Gentiles will be that which brings the nation to jealousy, and turn her to see the gospel as it is in Yeshua. Knowing this, the Gentile believers should see their obedience to God within the realm of faith in Yeshua as a tool in the Master's hand to accomplish His sovereign work toward Israel.

The point of the Apostle, then, is that all of the time that Israel is in the status of "enemy," she is at the same time in the state of being "beloved." The first status is temporary, the second permanent.

The fulfillment of the covenant made to the fathers is cast in the terms of "gifts" and "call-