

**The Great Olive Tree of Believers**  
**Romans 11:1-36**  
**February 15th 2026**  
**PREACHER: Pastor Roy Summers**

In my student days I was sent on a six month industry placement near St Albans. I made my spiritual home in a Bible believing Church Sunday by Sunday, where I was fed spiritually from God's Word. One sermon from those days made a deep impression on me—in fact it was just one question in the sermon. The preacher asked ....

*“Do you believe in the peril of the ungodly?”*

The preacher meant, not do you believe in the peril of unbelievers intellectually, as a mere doctrine, a tick box exercise, a test of orthodoxy, if you like—no, do you **really** believe that if someone dies without responding to the Gospel, without repenting of their sins, without believing in Jesus, they go, I speak plainly now, to the place Jesus described as "unquenchable fire," "outer darkness," and "weeping and gnashing of teeth?"

*“Do you believe in the peril of the ungodly?”*

If you and I saw a group of children meandering unwittingly, unknowingly, towards a 1000 foot cliff edge, we would surely do everything in our power to warn them. The “intellectual belief” in their imminent peril would have an impact on our behaviour.

In like manner, argued the preacher, if we say we believe in the peril of the ungodly, how does it actually affect our hearts, our prayers, our conversation, our urgency, towards the lost?

*“Do you and I **really** believe in the peril of the ungodly?”*

I don't remember what part of the Bible the preacher was speaking from—it could well have been from Romans 9 or 10, as we'll see in a moment.

Making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans, we've arrived at chapters 9-11, where Paul is wrestling with a puzzle: why are so many Jews of his day rejecting the Good news of Jesus? Especially since Jesus was their Messiah, predicted and promised in their book, the Old Testament? Gentiles (that's the rest of the world) were flocking to Christ in their droves and finding in Jesus, hope, forgiveness and peace, but few Jews. You would have expected exactly the reverse: that **the Jews** would welcome their Old Testament Messiah warmly, while the “outsider Gentiles” would be apathetic!

That is the puzzle that underlies Romans chapter 9,10 & 11. And Paul's answer to the puzzle is “election.”

From God's perspective, **Divine Sovereignty** is the reason only a few Jews are being saved:

*"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on who I have compassion." (9:15)*

Since God chooses, it is clear that at that particular moment in history, when Paul writes, God is only choosing a few Jews, but many Gentiles. (Almost no truth humbles human pride more than election—God decides who is saved, not us, right?! God is God and we are not. )

But on the other hand, from our ant-like creaturely perspective, **Human Responsibility** kicks in. Those who are lost are lost because **they** turn away from the gospel and harden their own hearts. That's why so few Jews were being saved: *"All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." (10:21)*. The Jews—**they!**—were stubbornly rejecting their Messiah!

Our human responsibility is 1) personally to believe the message of the Gospel, have you done that yet? and 2) as a church to preach and offer the Gospel to the world, to preach: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 10:13

Election is Paul's answer to the few-Jews-many-Gentiles puzzle. (We can all see, that election is a mystery beyond human understanding, one of the many glorious mysteries of Scripture: we must hold, at one and the same time, both to Divine Sovereignty and equally to Human Responsibility.) What I want us to grasp this morning, God helping us, is **why** this puzzle consumed Paul so much that he gave 3 whole chapters, around 30% of this letter to it. Why so many words written about the few-Jews-many-Gentiles problem, especially the so-few-Jews aspect of it?

There were four reasons:

**1) Paul loved his fellow Jews so much.** Literally the first, and perhaps the main reason was this: Paul loved his fellow Jews so much:

*"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." (9:1-3)*

Paul, the Jew, loved his fellow Jews so much he was deeply pained to see them dying in their sins. He says it again in chapter 10:1;

*"Brothers, my hearts desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." I know that some of you feel this anguish personally in your own hearts, over a wife or a husband, a daughter, or a son, a father or a mother who do not believe. In Luke 19, Jesus wept over unbelieving Jerusalem; he cries out in Matthew 23, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."*

May the Lord give to all of us the love of Christ for the people in our families, the people in our town/city, the “unnumbered souls who are dying and passing into the night.”

To Paul, the so-few-Jews wasn't a theoretical puzzle for debate, it was a heart pain to be felt and expressed in urgent prayer.

**2) Paul is concerned about the OT promises.** The second reason the many-Gentiles-few-Jews problem troubled Paul was the integrity of the OT. Some people, both then and today imagined that in the Old Testament God was promising that all the Jews would be saved, so how come so few? Has God's Word failed? Paul's answer is to say that God never promised that the whole nation of ethnic, Israel would be saved. It was always a small chosen few *within* the vast nation:

*“Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel... it is not the natural children (the biological children of Abraham) who are God's children, but it is the **children of the promise** who are regarded as Abraham's children.” (9:6-8)*

Remember Abraham had 8 biological children, but only one, Isaac, was chosen by God.

It is a mistake to think, both then and now that the whole nation of Israel, ethnic Jews are “God's people,” it has never been, it's always been a few, a remnant, within the nation that are chosen. Thank God for every true believing Jew alive today; but if the stats are correct, only around 2% of the present-day nation of Israel call themselves Christians, the vast majority have turned their backs on Christ Jesus, just as in the days of Paul.

The third reason Paul is exercised by the many-Gentiles-but-only-a-few-Jew problem is this: are things always going to remain this way? Will the Jews reject Jesus until the end of time?

**3) Paul is concerned about the future** of the Jewish nation. On this issue, I must tell you, Christians are in disagreement. Some Christians think that after the full number of God's chosen among the Gentiles are called in, then a large number of Jews will come in. They get this from 12:25-26:

*“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.” (11:25-26)*

Everything hangs on how you interpret the words “all Israel.”

It could be that just before Jesus returns there will be lots of Jews converted all of a sudden; that would be wonderful; but not all Christians hold that view. The fourth reason Paul is deeply concerned about the few-Jew-many-Gentile problem is in chapter 11, and it is about Gentiles getting proud.

#### **4) Paul is concerned about Gentiles getting proud.**

I am talking to you Gentiles..” (verse 13) “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.” (verse 20)

There were many Gentiles in the church at Rome, perhaps most of the believers were Gentiles when Paul writes, and he can see them gloating over the situation; “We must be more important than the Jews because God has chosen us but not them!”

Paul’s humbled them with an illustration and a rebuke.

Imagine the olive tree of all believers who have ever lived. The roots are completely Jewish, Abraham the first Jew, and the patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, so on. Until the day of Pentecost, all the branches of this tree were Jewish. There were one or two Gentile believers in the OT, such as Ruth and Rahab and the people of Nineveh who repented, but by and large all the branches were Jews.

Presently, now, says, Paul, to proud Gentiles, yes, God chopped off some of the Jewish branches, because of their unbelief (v.20) And Yes, God grafted some of you onto the tree...

*“you though a wild olive shoot have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the root.” (17)*

So that **now** the Olive tree of all believers contains a few Jewish branches and lots of Gentile branches. But Gentile believer never forget:

- The **root of the tree is Jewish**: “You do not support the root but the root supports you.” (18)
- You **are wild branches**, while Jews are the natural branches!
- Yes God broke off natural branches to graft you in, but if you become proud **he can cut you off again**, just as he did the natural branches.....and regraft the broken-off Jewish branches —and that will be much easier than grafting you on, because they are natural branches!
- In fact, Gentile believers, humble yourselves with this: one reason God has grafted you on the tree is to make Jews jealous so that they will be saved!

*“salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel envious!” (11:11)*

If anyone is a second-class citizen, it’s you Gentiles, is what Paul is saying!

*“Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.”*

Brothers and sisters, there is no place for pride in salvation, is there? “I must be special because I’ve been chosen, they must be lowborn because they are not saved.” “God has bound all men over to

disobedience so that he might have mercy on them all.” *“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a **wretch** like me.”*

May God keep us from all species of pride and make us, by his grace, “completely humble.” Is that not a take-home from chapter 11? We Gentile believers may not think of ourselves as better than Jews who reject the Gospel, but we can be proud for all sorts of other reasons, can we not. Proud of our heritage, proud of our knowledge, proud of our spiritual gifts: forgetting that everything we are and everything we have comes from God.

And surely that is why Paul ends this whole section of his letter with that doxology of praise