

A Critique of O. Palmer Robertson's Interpretation of Romans 11
by
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These three chapters [Rom 9-11] emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people. . . . But the assumption that the Church has simply replaced Israel as the people of God is extremely common. . . . I confess with shame to having also myself used in print on more than one occasion this language of the replacement of Israel by the Church.¹

In an article originally published in a collection of papers by the Evangelical Theological Society, O. Palmer Robertson addresses the question of Israel's future in Romans 11. Robertson is Professor of Old Testament at Knox Theological Seminary and Professor of Theology at African Bible College in Malawi. He is a seasoned Amillennial theologian who has expounded his position and offered some new ideas on the exposition of Romans 11 to attempt to resolve certain weakness in Amillennial approach to that chapter. His initial attempt at this appeared over twenty years ago in a volume of collected papers published by the Evangelical Theological Society. This paper was included with some slight revision as the sixth chapter in his work entitled *The Israel of God* which was published in 2000. Robertson states his purpose most clearly in the original work:

to evaluate exegetically the evidence in this chapter which might be interpreted as supporting the view that God intends in the future to deal with the Jews in a way which is distinctively different from the way in which he deals with them currently.²

¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 2. International Critical Commentary. Ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 448.

² O. Palmer Robertson, "Is There a Distinctive Future for Ethnic Israel in Romans 11" in Stanley N. Gundry and Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed. *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 209. This article was later revised and became the sixth chapter in O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Philipsburg: P&R, 2000), 167–192. This paper, which originally critiqued his first version, has been updated to reflect the most recent version of his argument. The original will hereafter be referred to as "Romans 11", the more recent as *Israel*.

It is Robertson's thesis that the numerous references to God's present saving work among the Jews are overlooked by many scholars in their efforts to direct attention to some alleged future restoration of Israel to God's soteriological focus. On one hand, he recognizes that these references to God's present saving activity among the Jews do not preclude a reference to a future work among Israel. On the other, he believes that this emphasis should lead to a greater investigation of the passage to discover if, indeed, there is a legitimate basis for seeing a future for Israel in the text. However, he finds no such basis in the text. Robertson contends that the passage describes God's present work of saving the elect of Israel. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate Robertson's arguments to determine, 1) if the focus of Romans 11 is exclusively the present work of God among the elect of Israel, 2) if the exegetical points Robertson makes are valid, and 3) if they are, if his interpretation of these points is correct.

Since Robertson divides his discussion of the passage into two major divisions, this paper will follow his outline. First, he examines the "evidence that Rom. 11 deals with God's present intention for ethnic Israel." Second, he examines "possible references in Rom. 11 to God's intention to deal distinctively with ethnic Israel in the future."

Evidence That Romans 11 Deals with God's Present Intention for Ethnic Israel.

In this section of his chapter Robertson argues that there are pervasive references in Romans 11 to God's *present* intention for Israel which are not adequately dealt with in most discussions. He argues that these references to a present work do not necessarily exclude parallel references to some future purpose, but they do warn the exegete against assuming too hastily that the entirety of Romans 11 deals with Israel's distinctive future.³

³ Robertson, *Israel*, 171.

While he admits that “most commentators are aware of the references in Romans 11 to God’s current saving activity among the Jews,”⁴ he goes on to suggest that their pervasiveness “as well as their significance for the total thrust of the chapter is generally overlooked.”⁵ With this in mind he examines six verses which he considers important for establishing his thesis (Rom. 11:1, 5, 13, 14, 30, 31). He concludes

The eye of man cannot tell how large this number is. But the eye of faith is confident that the full number is being realized. For this reason, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to posit some future date at which the remnant will be superseded by the full number.⁶

Before evaluating his arguments, the place of the argument of Romans 11 within the overall structure of the epistle must be examined.

Romans 11 in the Argument of the Epistle

Under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit Paul pens the Epistle to the Romans to vindicate the righteousness of God in His treatment of sinful man by providing a gracious redemption through faith alone in Christ alone. Romans 1:16 is frequently cited as the key verse in Romans; “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” This “gospel” is further explained in the next verse, “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith . . .” Throughout the epistle Paul relates the Jews/Israel to this theme: in 1:18–5:21 he relates Israel to the righteousness of God and justification (2:9–10, 17, 28–29, 3:1, 9, 29); in 6:1–8:17 he relates Israel to the righteousness of God and sanctification through the contrast of grace and law, in 8:18–39

⁴ Ibid., 168

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 175.

he relates Israel to the righteousness of God and glorification,⁷ in 9:1–11:36 he relates Israel to the righteousness of God and its vindication, and in 12:1–16:27, he relates Israel to the righteousness of God and its practical application.⁸

From this analysis the integrity of Rom. 9—11 is substantiated. Romans 11 is “fitted integrally into this unit” as Robertson affirms.⁹ Romans 9 demonstrates the righteousness of God in His rejection of national Israel; chapter 10 demonstrates that that rejection is based on Israel’s corporate neglect of the revelation given to them. Chapter 11 then answers the question, “has God cast away His people? The hermeneutical issue is whether or not Paul’s answer to this question reveals a distinctive future in God’s plan for ethnic, corporate Israel different from that of the present, “gospel era?” An examination of the text indicates that a present plan for saving some Israelites is in view, at least in the first ten verses, but is this the focus of the whole chapter, as Robertson suggests, or does it merely provide the setting for demonstrating that God’s righteousness toward Israel will be vindicated by their yet future, national repentance?

Romans 11:1

In this verse Paul raises the question, “Has God cast off His people?” Paul responds to this rhetorical question with his strongest negative, *me genoito*. Commentators suggest two possible interpretations of Paul’s use of himself to illustrate his answer.¹⁰ First, since he is an Israelite, his own acceptance shows that God has not completely rejected Israel.

⁷ In 8:18039 Paul introduces vocabulary such as “elect,” and “foreknowledge” which had special meaning for the Jew and are then applied to Israel in Rom 9—11. Paul sets up his discussion of Israel in Romans 9–11 by the question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” in 8:35. For the Jewish reader might assume that Israel had once been assured of God’s love but God had removed that love. Such an implication would lead to confusion over the permanence and security of salvation.

⁸ I am indebted to Howard W. Laing, *Israel in the Epistle to the Romans* (Unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962), 12–55, for this breakdown and analysis.

⁹ Robertson, *Israel*, 168.

¹⁰ Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament* (London: Rivingtons, n.d., Reprint: Grand Rapids, Guardian Press, 1976), 2:424.

But if this were Paul's argument, he could just as easily have pointed to thousands of saved Israelites for evidence.¹¹ Or second, simply that such an assertion would exclude Paul himself, as an Israelite, from God's kingdom.¹² The strength of the latter view is that it explains Paul's strong negative assertion as well as gives more meaning to his statement that he is "an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." This seems more consistent with Paul's emphasis on corporate Israel in this chapter. Although Murray's comment that there does not seem to be enough evidence to support one view over another should be kept in mind.¹³

Robertson offers the first of these as the reason for Paul's use of himself; he says Paul offers himself as "a present trophy of the grace of God."¹⁴ However, the significance he attaches to this is that the argument of this paragraph is on the present work of God among Israel. He also suggests that the lack of a reference to a future work indicates that Paul has the present in mind. This is very likely. His next citation (verse 5) seems to confirm this.

Romans 11:5

Robertson's only point here is that the reference to "this present time" (*en to nun kairo*) emphasizes the present position of Israel in God's plan. He concludes that because of the present emphasis of these verses the first paragraph (Romans 11:1–10) is oriented to the question of God's dealing with Israel in the present. He affirms that Paul's citation of the episode with Elijah (I Kings 19:10–18) is to show that throughout history God has

¹¹ Alford rejects this for a number of reasons. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 2:66, notes that this position is held by Luther, Calvin, Hodge, Godet, Liddon, Gaugler, et al.

¹² Murray, *Romans*, 2:66, cites Meyer, Sanday and Headlam, Gifford as upholding this view. Alford and Wuest agree.

¹³ Murray, *Romans*, 2:67

¹⁴ Robertson, "Romans 11," 168.

always had a remnant. Paul seems to be drawing a comparison between Israel's former state of rebellion at the time of Elijah, and the few faithful at that time, with the rebellious state of Israel at his own present time. In both cases the nation as a whole had rejected God, nevertheless, because of God's faithfulness to His elect nation, there always was and would continue to be a remnant.

Romans 11:13, 14

Robertson asserts that the context indicates that "provoking to jealousy" and the "saving" of some in Israel must be construed as taking place in the present time. According to him, Paul is arguing here that he magnifies his ministry so that Jews will become jealous as they see Gentile believers sharing in the blessings of the Messianic kingdom. He then suggests that this present saving work is connected to the following verses by the *ei gar* of verse 15. This would mean that the ones rejected (verse 15) are the same group who have "acceptance" in verse 15 and are to be identified with the "some saved" in verse 14. This he interprets as Paul's hoped for consequence of his current ministry.¹⁵

This is a critical exegetical move on Robertson's part. By making it, he strengthens his case that this middle section of the chapter has the current consequences of Paul's ministry as its focus, not the future. The premillennial view makes a distinction here which is the result of determining the correct antecedent of the "their" of verses 11–15. One important exegetical point Robertson fails to mention is that verses 13 and 14 appear to be parenthetical. The *ei gar* explains verse 12, not verse 14. This is supported by the parallel thought expressed in these two verses. If this parenthesis can be demonstrated, then the thrust of this middle section is not the present dispensation at all. Rather this

¹⁵ Ibid., 169.

section serves as a transition from the present state of Israel as hardened to its future return to a place of blessing. A more complete discussion of the implications of this section will be presented in the section which focuses on a future for Israel.

Romans 11:17–24

Again Robertson asserts that this paragraph concerns itself with the expectation of a positive response of Israel to the present preaching of the Gospel. Although Robertson understands the Israel of 11:1 to refer to corporate Israel,¹⁶ his treatment of Israel in these verses is not clear. He seems to refer to individual Jews rather than corporate Israel. He fails to identify the “they” of verse 23 and never clarifies the meaning of “grafted in.” It appears he simply assumes their meaning for he fails to give any exegetical support for his conclusions. He assumes the passage is referring to individual salvation of lost Jews in the present and since it is individual salvation, he argues that they cannot be kept waiting until some indefinite time in the future to be grafted in while each and *every* (emphasis mine, showing the individual nature) Gentile experiences the blessings of the covenant. However, *every* single Gentile does not experience salvation.

He also seems to suggest that the nature of the olive tree is soteriological, unfortunately he does not explain this. The problem this interpretation creates is ignored. If the illustration is of present time salvation of individuals then the cutting off in verse 22 would indicate a loss of salvation. Although he purports to be deriving exegetical data which supports a present era view of this chapter, at this crucial juncture he merely assumes rather than exegetically demonstrates his conclusion. The identification of these critical terms awaits the section of the paper which deals with evidence for a future work.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Romans 11:31, 32

Robertson's major point here is the use of the threefold "now" in these verses. He asserts that this is a comparison between the present work of God among the Gentiles and that among the Jews. In the present time, *now*, Gentiles have received mercy who were previously disobedient. Now Israel is disobedient. Because of the mercy shown the Gentiles, they may now receive mercy. His point is that this last now, though it has a textual problem, demonstrates that the entire argument is that God has not rejected His people, but is presently showing them mercy.¹⁷

The focus, he claims, is not on a future work among Israel. His arguments demonstrate a continued emphasis on God's present work in Israel, but they do not necessarily negate the possibility of a future work.¹⁸ He concludes these references are pervasive and significant.¹⁹ This evaluation of his argument has shown that there is clearly a reference in this chapter to the present work of God among the Israelites, but this present emphasis is confined to the first (verses 1-10) and second (verses 13, 14) paragraphs. Robertson has not established his case for a present time orientation of the remainder of the chapter.

Possible References in Romans 11 to God's Intention to Deal Distinctively With Ethnic Israel in the Future

Herein lies the crux of the passage. The battleground between the amillennial and the premillennial centers on a future plan for ethnic Israel (even postmillennialists admit to

¹⁷ The textual evidence for this third "now" is at best evenly split. In the view of this writer Robertson commits an error by using this as support for his view. "The *vūv* (*nun*) would not greatly affect the sense (the "now" time includes two phases; see on 11:31) and is not inappropriate structurally, but is still slightly awkward. A clear-cut decision either way is not possible (Lietzmann, Metzger)." cf., James D. G. Dunn, Vol. 38B, *Word Biblical Commentary : Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary, Page 677. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

some future return in God's plan to ethnic Israel).²⁰ While recognizing that many understand this passage to refer to a special intention on God's part for Israel in the future, Robertson suggests that, a more careful examination of these portions may lead to a different perspective on the major outlook of the chapter. Several sections in particular deserve special consideration.²¹

To establish this he examines Romans 11:1, 2a, 12, 15, 17–24, 25–26a. His arguments will be examined, but in order to arrive at a more accurate understanding of the verses in question, a selective exegesis of the intervening verses is necessary.

Romans 11:1, 2a

Robertson begins by contending that Paul's denial of the question, "God has not rejected His people, has He?" is "generally understood as indicating that God still must intend to deal distinctively with Israel in the future."²² While Robertson is correct that to nuance the question as "Has God cast off ethnic Israel with respect to his special plan for their future?" predisposes the text to a futurist slant, to nuance the question the way he suggests, "Has God cast off ethnic Israel altogether as they might relate to his purposes of redemption?" is just as much the product of a certain theological preunderstanding of the text. Both suggestions are determined by one's prior conclusions concerning the nature of the argument in the chapter.

To frame the question as he suggests emphasizes individual salvation as the primary thought of the chapter. He further clarifies his understanding of the question as, "Is there

²⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 2:84; David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 128, 388; *Paradise Restored* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1985), 125-131. Although postmillis emphasize a return it is not a unique corporate salvation, for ultimately all nations will be saved, so Israel will just be one among many nations who are saved, no longer as a distinct covenant people.

²¹ Robertson, *Israel*, 171.

²² Robertson, *Israel*, 171

any hope for the continuation of a saving activity of God among the Israelites.”²³ By this he clearly means, is it yet possible that an Israelite can be saved? This points up a major flaw in his position. Robertson fails throughout the paper to address clearly whether or not the Israel mentioned is corporate or individual. By failing to make this identification he is able to slip from an individual interpretation over to a corporate sense and back as it fits his argument.²⁴ Thus he misses the implications and allusions to national promises.

Romans 11:1 is clearly talking about corporate Israel, not individual Jews. Robertson appears to understand this by his repeated use of the term “ethnic Israel.” That this is the correct interpretation is clear for the following reasons. First, the *lego oun*, of verse 1 draws an inference from the *alla lego* of 10:18, 19 and each of those statements refers to Israel as a corporate, ethnic unit who, as a group, even though some individuals were saved, rejected God’s gracious gift of Jesus as Messiah. Second, the references in 11:1 to “His people” and in 11:2 to “His people which he foreknew” indicate a corporate view. It would be impossible for God to reverse His unconditional election of the nation.

Although there is some debate over whether this reference is to the nation as a whole considered as elect, or to the elect within the nation, after reviewing the evidence Murray states:

it is more tenable, therefore, to regard “his people” (v. 1) and “his people which he foreknew” (v. 2) as identical in their reference and the qualifying clause in verse 2 as expressing what is really implied in the designation “his people”. If Israel can be called God’s “people”, it is only that which is implied in “foreknowledge” that warrants the appellation. There should be no difficulty in recognizing the appropriateness of calling Israel the people whom God foreknew. Israel had been elected and peculiarly loved and

²³ Even taking this as individual salvation has little bearing on the overall issue between amillennialists and premillennialists.

²⁴ For example, Robertson repeatedly speaks of “ethnic Israel” yet in the same paragraph and within the same sentence he shifts between a corporate to an individual salvation, cf., 172.

thus distinguished from all other nations... It is in this sense that “foreknew” would be used in this case.²⁵

A third reason that the nation as a whole must be in view is Paul’s use of the example from I Kings 19:10–18. After answering the question in 11:1, Paul first presented himself as exhibit “A” and then pointed out that the faithful God of Israel would never cast off His special nation, he compared his present situation to that at the time of Elijah. In Elijah’s time almost the entire nation was in a state of rebellion, Elijah thought he alone was left, but God instructed him differently. There was a remnant of seven thousand kept by God. As at that former time, so also in Paul’s. The nation as a whole has rejected God’s offer of salvation through Jesus the Messiah. While the nation as a corporate entity was characterized by rebellion, there were still those among the nation besides Paul who were kept by God. Even in the worst times of apostasy, God kept a believing remnant in Israel. These are the remnant of 11:5. Paul is not concerned with individual salvation, he is establishing the point that God continues to work with His chosen covenant people.

Robertson contends that the answer Paul gives in verses 1–2*a* focuses only on the condition of Israel in the present age. This is true as far as it goes. It seems that in the structure of the chapter verses 1–10 only introduces the answer. Robertson fails to notice the second inferential οὖν of the chapter which relates verse 11 back to what has been said in verse 7. Paul established the remnant principle in verses 2–5 but shifts his focus to those not included in the remnant in verses 11–16. In verse 7, which Robertson overlooks, Paul goes on to state that this group which was designated a “remnant” in verse 5 is further designated “those who were chosen in contrast to the rest who were

²⁵ Murray, *Romans*, 2:68. Murray notes that Hodge, Calvin and Haldane advocate the position that the reference is to the elect within Israel; Meyer, Philippi, Liddon, Gifford, Godet, Sanday and Headlam take the other, 67n.

hardened.” It is this division of Israel into two groups, the elect of the present age and the hardened of the present age, that becomes the focus of the next section. Robertson fails even to mention this which causes him to completely misinterpret the next paragraph and to force its application into the present period.

Romans 11:12–15

Before Robertson’s arguments concerning these two verses are fully discussed the relationship of this paragraph (11:11-16) to the preceding one (11:1-10) must be established. Only when this has been done will we be in a position to determine if Robertson has correctly interpreted the passage.

As noted previously, the (*oun*) of verse 11 draws an inference from the previous paragraph. At the beginning of that paragraph Paul had raised another rhetorical question *ti oun* “what then?” (11:7) Paul asks, in light of the remnant doctrine and God’s faithfulness to His covenant people, what is God’s plan for Israel as a corporate entity? Paul had divided them between the elect (remnant) and those who were hardened (11:7). Quotations from Is. 29:10, Dt. 24:4 and Psalm 69:23 described and emphasized the hardening that had come upon Israel. If the chapter had concluded at verse 7 the amillennialist might have a strong argument, unfortunately, Paul continued to write. He goes on to address the question about the state of these who were hardened, “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?” (11:11). The antecedent of the “they” would seem to clearly be the non-remnant, the ones “hardened” and described in verses 8–10. Once this identification is made it becomes evident that the subject of verses 11–15 is the subgroup among corporate Israel who are hardened, not the remnant. The present time

(verse 5) has the salvation of the remnant as its focus. The question Paul had raised in 11:1 concerns the ultimate fate of the second group, those hardened.

The wording of the question in verse 11, indicates a final and complete fall. One source amplifies it as:

The rejection of Israel then is only partial. Yet still there is the great mass of the nation on whom God's judgement has come: what of these? Is there no further hope for them? Is this stumbling of theirs such as will lead to a final and complete fall? By no means. It is only temporary, a working out of the Divine purpose.²⁶

The combined use of *ptaio* "stumble" here with *pipto* "fall" indicates Paul is asking whether or not this hardening, or falling, is irrevocable.²⁷ His phrasing indicates he expects a negative reply. In the strongest of terms he rejects this inference and states that the falling of the "hardened" group is not final. From this we see that a correct understanding of this paragraph is crucial to the interpretation of the chapter. If the subject of this section, the plural "they," is identified as the hardened of Israel in the present, then verse 11 clearly begins the transition to God's future intentions. However, if the subject of the section is considered to be individuals who were first hardened and then became saved the passage could be understood to be refer to the present period. This apparently is Robertson's approach.

Robertson's treatment of this crucial section focuses on verses 12 and 15. As stated earlier in the discussion of verses 13, 14, it would appear that verses 13 and 14 are

²⁶ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 318.

²⁷ For the full explanation of the strengths and weakness of the different views cf., C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 2:554; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 320; Witmer, "Romans," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Wheaton: Victor, 1983), 2:483; Contra taken by Murray, *Romans*, 2:75,76. Murray wants to focus more on the individuals within the group. However, with the exception of the "some" in verse 14, Paul is not concerned with individuals in this chapter but with God's future plan for Israel as a corporate entity.

parenthetical to Paul's main thought in this paragraph. Robertson seems to suggest this possibility by treating them as a unit, and treating verses 12 and 15 as related and parallel. Unfortunately, as at other crucial hermeneutical junctures he fails to specifically address this. This causes him to misinterpret the focus of the paragraph.

Robertson's argument is that this entire cycle of "falling," "casting away," "fullness,"²⁸ and "receiving" takes place with reference to Jewish individuals in the "present era of gospel proclamation." He demonstrates this by pointing to the way Paul compares the Gentile experience to the Jews and then leaps ahead to verse 30 in order to demonstrate the parallel. Here he again stresses the use of the third "now" in vs. 31. This movement from disobedience to mercy is paralleled in both Gentiles and Israelites. On this basis he argues that the "receiving" or "acceptance" of Israel refers "to the engrafting of believing Jews throughout the present era which would reach its consummation at the point in time at which their 'fulness' would be realized."²⁹

Aside from his failure to define the subject of these verses as the non-remnant of verse 7, his position becomes vulnerable at two points. First, his use of verses 30 and 31 to explain verses 12–15 is suspect. Verses 30–31 appear more to be a summary of the whole than a specific statement. Second his argument is based on the identification of the "some" of verse 14 with the ones accepted in verse 15. Earlier it was briefly noted that verses 13–14 ought to be taken as a parenthetical aside within the thought flow of this paragraph. Three reasons for doing this are: 1) the transgression/failure-fulfillment

²⁸ Although Robertson claims to be quoting the NASB his Scripture citations do not match KJV NKJV NASB or NIV. He uses "fulness" in place of NASB "fulfillment" and "receiving" in place of NASB "acceptance."

²⁹ Robertson, *Israel*, 174.

movement of verse 12 is paralleled by the rejection-acceptance movement in verse 15, as

Murray notes:

The “receiving” is contrasted with the “casting away” and must, therefore, mean the reception of Israel again into the favour and blessing of God. In terms of the whole passage, as noted repeatedly, this must refer to Israel as a whole and implies that this restoration is commensurate in scale with Israel’s rejection, the restoration of the mass of Israel in contrast with the “casting off”.³⁰

2) The “their” of vs. 15 are rejected people, the “their” of vs. 12 are also identified as failed people, and 3) the failure of both groups provide a means of blessing to the “world.”³¹ The reason for the inclusion of this aside to the Gentiles is to emphasize the importance of this judgment on Israel to them.

In light of these arguments Robertson’s conclusion that it is “quite appropriate to interpret the ‘fulness’ and the ‘receiving’ of Israel from the perspective of God’s current activity of salvation among the Jews is unacceptable. He not only fails to correctly identify the group in question, but fails to identify the relationship of verses 13, 14 to the context which is crucial for the interpretation of the passage. Further, his discussion about the size and nature of the remnant is deemed irrelevant, for either a small or large remnant is acceptable within a premillennial interpretation.³² But no matter how large the remnant it is still a minority among the nation as a whole. The major error here is that his failure to identify the antecedents of the plural pronoun “their” causes him to relate the completed number of the remnant to the idea of “fulness.”

Robertson takes the fullness here to refer to the full number of elect Jews, and relates this to his interpretation of “all Israel” in verse 26 (see below). This view is consistent

³⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 2:81.

³¹ Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 323; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:559; Murray, *Romans*, 2:80 states “the thought of verse 12 is reiterated in verse 15.”

³² However, Paul’s comparison with the remnant of Elijah’s time gives the impression of a small number.

with his soteriological understanding of the passage. However, the context contrasts the fullness of Israel with her position of unbelief, rejection, sin, and loss. Since the passage views Israel as a corporate whole, then the fullness must be viewed as a unity of the nation as opposed to the present divisions. Since Israel fell as a nation, they must be restored as a nation.

The use of *pleroma* could indicate the completion of a number, the completion of God's plan or reaching a full complement. The first nuance would support Robertson's interpretation, although the word might have a broader meaning. The second nuance would refer to future time when all of God's covenant promises will be completely fulfilled in Israel and her promised King reigns in Israel (see later on verse 26). The third connotation would be a "fullness" or "wholeness" in contrast to something partial. The solution is found in the context by noting the contrast with their "loss" (*hettema*, v. 12). The "loss" was corporate and was a removal from the place of blessing, so the "fullness" appears to be a corporate return to the place of blessing. Paul is saying that if the removal of Israel from the place of blessing, and their division into two groups resulted in riches for the Gentiles, how much more blessing would ensue from their return to a place of blessing and unity.

Although Robertson fails to treat 11:16, its interpretation and relationship to the argument of the passage should be noted. The *gar* draws an inference from the preceding paragraph and the reference to the root and branches sets up the illustration to be developed in verses 17-24. In this statement Paul gives the ground for the restoration of Israel:

St. Paul gives in this verse the grounds of his confidence in the future of Israel. This is based upon the holiness of the Patriarchs from whom they

are descended and the consecration to God which has been the result of this holiness. His argument is expressed in two different metaphors, both of which however have the same purpose.³³

The first figure introduced is of the meal and the firstfruit. Paul has Num. 15:19–20 in mind:

Then it shall be that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the Lord. Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up.

“First of your dough” is rendered *aparchen phuramatos* in the LXX which is the terminology Paul uses in Rom. 11. The passage describes the act where the Israelite was to offer to the Lord a portion of the meal first (first fruits “*aparche*”) which then permitted the free use of the remainder of the meal (*phurama*). The setting apart (*hagios*) of the firstfruit set apart the meal from which it was taken.

Four interpretations of this are offered. First, the lump represents Jewish Christians which are a pledge for the future salvation of the nation. This understands the firstfruit to represent the Jewish remnant, their salvation sets apart the remainder with a view to the ultimate salvation of all Israel.³⁴ The second is a variation of the first, Barrett suggests that behind the Jewish Christians Paul sees Christ.³⁵ A third interpretation sees the lump and the branches as a reference to all the spiritual descendants of Abraham.³⁶ The fourth, and most common interpretation, is that the lump and the branches represent the physical descendants of Abraham.³⁷ Of these four views the first two see a distinction in the

³³ Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 326.

³⁴ Barrett, *Romans*, 216; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:564.

³⁵ Barrett, *Romans*, 216.

³⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle To the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 703.

³⁷ Dale Younce, “The Olive Tree In Romans 11” (Unpublished ThM. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1963), 13-17; Murray, *Romans*, 2:85; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 326.

application of the lump and the root while the second two view the two figures as parallel, the lump and the root represent the same thing.

The second figure is of the root and the branches. Root (*riza*) is used metaphorically in Scripture to refer to the origin or ancestry of something.³⁸ The term branch (*klados*) is also used metaphorically.³⁹ In both figures there is something, either the first fruit or the root, which is said to be holy, which sets apart something larger. *Hagios* here should not be understood as personal righteousness or holiness, but indicates that which has been set apart for the purposes of God. The first fruit was set aside to God and by this action the entire harvest is said to be set apart to God. The root is set apart to God and by the branches participation in the root, they are said to be set apart to God.

The parallelism and emphasis on being set apart indicates the figures should be interpreted as representing the same thought. Lenski's interpretation is suspect because it is difficult to understand how spiritual descendants of Abraham, i.e., the branches, can be broken off. This would imply a loss of salvation since spiritual descent is based upon faith. So in light of 11:28 which states that Israel is "beloved for the sake of the fathers," it is best to understand the figure of the lump and root as relating to the same thing, the patriarchs, specifically Abraham or the Abrahamic Covenant.⁴⁰ The Patriarchs and their

³⁸ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 564. It is used in the New Testament to refer to the literal root of a plant (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), the figurative root of a plant (Mt. 13:6,21; Mk. 4:6,17; and the present passage), and to the origin of a matter (I Tim. 6:10; Heb. 12:15). In the LXX it is used to refer to the nation Israel (Ps. 80:9; Hosea 14:5; Isa. 37:31; Ezek. 16:3), to the Messiah (Isa. 11:1; 10; 53:2), and to the nations (Ezek. 17:6-9), Assyria (Ezek. 31:7), and to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:12); William, F Arndt., Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, c 1979), 736. (Hereafter, BDAG)

³⁹ Dale Younce, "The Olive Tree in Romans 11," 16.

⁴⁰ Further support for this is given by Carl Hoch, "The Significance of the *Sun*-Compounds," 182; he cites the mention of the patriarchs and covenants in 9:4,5, the relation of the seed of Abraham to the promise,

descendants have been set apart to God as a chosen nation through whom the blessings of God especially in salvation will be channeled to all mankind.

The interpretation of these figures in verse sixteen is crucial to the interpretation of the olive tree illustration in verses 17–24. In verses 11–16 Paul has already stated that the group who have stumbled have not fallen irretrievably. There is a suggestion of a possible future acceptance for them. The ground for that acceptance is their identification with their fathers, specifically Abraham. Their past guarantees their future.⁴¹

Romans 11:17–24

It is somewhat surprising that Robertson gives this passage the brief treatment he does. He notes that it is frequently “considered in terms of a distinctive future for ethnic Israel,” and that the “figure of regrafting necessarily implies corporate inclusion at a future date when God will deal distinctively with Israel.”⁴² One expects, but fails to find, a detailed exegesis or explanation of the elements of the figure. At one place Robertson seems to suggest the figure represents experiencing the blessings of the covenant (which covenant is not specified),⁴³ but here he suggests the ingrafting represents the reception of the blessings of redemption.⁴⁴ This would then mean that the figure of being grafted into the olive tree would represent personal salvation and the tree would represent the people of God.⁴⁵

9:7–8; Paul’s reference to himself as the “seed of Abraham,” (11:1), and the emphasis on Abraham in Rom. 4.

⁴¹ This is a strong argument against anti-Semitism. Even though the remnant has rejected Christ as Messiah, because they are rooted in Abraham, they are still set apart and unique.

⁴² Robertson, *Israel*, 175.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁵ Carl Hoch “The Significance of *Syn*-compounds for Jew Gentile Relationships in the Body of Christ” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 25 (June 1982): 182, notes twelve different interpretations for the olive tree in Romans 11. It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate each. Although Robertson

The major thrust of the apostle's argument about the grafting process is that Israelites experience salvation and incorporation among God's people precisely in the same manner as the Gentiles. Nothing in the figure of ingrafting necessarily communicates the idea of a distinctive and corporate inclusion of the Jews at some future date.⁴⁶

Evaluation of this statement demands an analysis of the olive tree illustration.

As stated earlier the root of the tree is to be understood as that which sets apart the branches which proceed from it. The root is to be identified as the patriarch, specifically Abraham, or the Abrahamic covenant. The natural branches then represent the physical descendants of Abraham. Their relationship to the root puts them in the place of blessing rather than as recipients of salvation.

There are three basic problems which Robertson's view fails to consider. First, throughout this passage the "Israel" and "Gentiles" are used as collective nouns. Paul has corporate groups in mind, not individuals. In verses 17-24 he shifts from the plural reference to a singular emphatic *su*. This is a collective singular referring to the Gentiles as a whole. So the wild olive branches grafted in are Gentiles as a whole, not individual Gentiles. Second, if the relation to the olive tree speaks of salvation, the Israelites who were saved would then lose their salvation by being broken off (v. 17) and the Gentiles could lose salvation when they are broken off (v. 22) This is scripturally unsound. Third, the breaking off of some of the natural branches is reminiscent of Paul's earlier references to Israel's being rejected (v. 1), hardened (v. 7), stumbling (v. 11), transgression (v. 12), failure (v. 12), failure (v. 12), rejection (v. 15). The branches broken off and regrafted would not refer to the elect of v. 7 for they are not broken off. Thus the natural branches broken off must refer to the hardened group of Israelites which

does not specifically identify it as such, he takes the normal amillennial position that the tree represents the church of God through the ages, what he calls "God's people."

⁴⁶ Robertson, *Israel*, 176.

are the subject of verses 7-16 and have been removed from the place of blessing.

Corporately Israel is viewed as hardened, although some are presently being saved.

Corporately Israel is no longer the primary channel of God's blessing to the world.

For these reasons, the root must be understood as the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant, and being a branch in the tree then represents being placed by God into the covenant blessings and the primary channel for salvation blessing to the world. Israel, because of their rejection of Christ and their hardening, is presently not in the place of blessing as a corporate entity. Gentiles though, the "wild olive branches" are in a place of blessing and the primary recipients of the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant during this age, and the ones through whom God is blessing the world.

However, Paul strongly warns Gentile believers not to allow this to cause them to become proud or arrogant. This is the purpose of the extended metaphor. Paul warns the Gentiles that as a corporate entity they now stand in the place of blessing corporate Israel once held. This is not due to any inherent good in them, but is due exclusively to the grace of God. They are further warned that "if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you." (v. 21). This strongly hints of the possibility that if they reject the grace of God toward them God will remove them from the place of blessing. Further, Paul suggests the possibility in verse 23 that if Israel as a nation returns in faith to God, then as a nation they will be returned to a place of blessing within the covenant.

While Robertson is correct that there is nothing in the figure that "communicates the idea of a distinctive and corporate inclusion of the Jews at some future date," Paul does indicate that possibility which fits with the natural flow of his argument in this chapter. In the first ten verses he showed that God had not totally rejected Israel, there was still a

remnant. In verses 11–16 he said that those hardened would be returned to a place of blessing because of their relationship to Abraham and God’s faithfulness to his promises. Then in verses 17–24 he warns the Gentiles against pride in their new position and suggests again the possibility of a future for Israel. It is in the next section, in verses 25–26 that that return is promised.

Romans 11:25–26a

Robertson correctly notes that “these verses pinpoint the crux of the controversy.”⁴⁷ His argument focuses on three statements which he claims are usually taken to support the position that God has a future plan for ethnic Israel. As has been already pointed out, Robertson makes some important observations, but what he fails to mention seems even more significant.

“*Hardening in part has happened to Israel*” (v. 25) Robertson’s point in his analysis of this phrase focuses on the *apo merous* and its function. He claims, *Apo merous* often is interpreted as having a temporal reference. According to this suggestion the passage would mean: “for a while hardening has happened to Israel.” He states that a temporal usage of *apo merous* is difficult to substantiate in the New Testament. So he concludes “the apostle is saying that a part of Israel has been hardened.”

Unfortunately Robertson does not cite any commentator who asserts a temporal usage of “in part.” This would have been helpful. From the commentaries and articles surveyed by this writer, no such assertion was found (see bibliography). Therefore, Robertson is correct, but his point is uncontested.

Hardening... until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in (v. 25). Robertson discusses the importance of two points in this phrase, 1) the nature of the hardening and 2) the precise

⁴⁷ Robertson, *Israel*, 176.

force of the phrase which is rendered “until” (*achris ou*). Robertson’s contention is that a correct understanding of this phrase does not give weight to a distinct future for ethnic Israel.

Robertson spends more than a page discussing hardening which indicates its importance in establishing his position. However, his conclusion is unclear. He begins with a brief summary of the nature of hardening within Israel (11:7-10) and within the sovereign outworking of God’s redemptive plan. He asserts that among the numbers of humanity God elects some to salvation and the rest are hardened. This soteriological hardening never ceases. It appears that his argument is that since God does not cease his hardening of the unregenerate, non-elect of mankind in general, it is inconsistent to suggest that he will cease his hardening among the unregenerate, non-elect of Israel. This is clearly a case of reading an *a priori* deduction into the text. Since Paul is not focusing on individual salvation, this argument is irrelevant. In fact, Paul states that the ultimate return of blessing to the nations is gracious, just as the first, (11:5–6).

As this paper pointed out earlier, Robertson’s major error concerning the group that is described as hardened in Romans 11 is that he fails to see that it is specifically that group, not the elect of v. 7, that is the subject of vv. 11–24. The hardened of v. 7 are the rejected of v. 15 and the natural branches broken off. Paul is looking on the hardened as a group not as individuals. As a whole Israel has been set aside from the primary place of blessing. This does not mean that some Israelites are not saved during the present age, that was Paul’s focus in verses 1–10, but that as a corporate unit they are not the primary recipients or channels of Abrahamic covenantal blessing. They have been replaced by the wild olive branches.

Robertson contends this does not indicate a future for ethnic Israel because it would be inconsistent in the sovereign plan of God for him to remove the hardening from a group previously hardened. This is a theological deduction that is not supported by the text. The second and more crucial issue is the “precise force of the phrase which is rendered ‘until’ in Rom. 11:25.” Robertson argues that *achris ou* has only a *terminus ad quem* significance:

The least that can be said is that this phrase “hardening. . .until” cannot in itself bear the weight of determining the question as to whether or not Romans 11 positively proposes that God shall deal distinctively with ethnic Israel in the future in a manner in which he is not dealing with the Jews today.⁴⁸

The phrase, he contends, only brings matters up to a certain point without indicating the state of affairs subsequent to the termination.

To support this he cites Acts 22:4 and Hebrews 4:12 which on the surface indicate only a finalizing significance. In eschatological contexts, he suggests this same usage prevails. In support of this further claim he also cites 1 Cor. 11:26, Matt. 24:38, and 1 Cor. 15:25. He then quotes J. Jeremias:

Actually, in the New Testament *achris ou* with the aorist subjunctive without *an* regularly introduces a reference to reaching the eschatological goal, Rom. 11:25, 1 Cor. 15:25; Lk. 21:24.”⁴⁹

The construction here is *achri* plus the genitive relative \acute{o} which makes it a conjunction not a preposition.⁵⁰ The preposition has the idea of “before.” But when *achris ou* is used as a conjunction with the aorist subjunctive, it always has the force of a future perfect,

⁴⁸Robertson, “Romans 11”, 220.

⁴⁹J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966) 253; cited in Robertson, *Israel*, 220.

⁵⁰BDAG, 160.

“until, to the time that.”⁵¹ Neither Acts 22:4 nor Hebrews 4:12 uses *achri* in this sense, so they are not useful for establishing the point in question.

Robertson’s claim is that “until” merely shows conditions up to a certain point. This much is correct, but a survey of the context of the passages where the context of all of its uses does envision a state of affairs which reaches a point of completion and then culminates in a change of circumstances, if not a reversal of circumstances. Deere notes that this occurs three times in Revelation and in each instance *achri* implies a more than implies a change which “occurs after the point to which it refers is reached.”⁵²

In Luke 1:20 Gabriel is speaking to Zacharias, “And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place.” The clear indication from the passage is not merely that Zachariah will remain dumb to a certain point but once that point is reached the temporary condition will change and he will be able to speak.

In Mt. 24:38 (cited by Robertson) and its parallel Luke 17:27 Jesus remarks that the people of Noah’s day ate and drank “until” Noah entered the ark. Robertson comments:

The point of this assertion is not that a day came in which the people no longer ate and drank. Instead the point is that they continued with their eating and drinking until their “eschaton” arrived.⁵³

While his observation that the main point seems to be that things continued i.e., eating and drinking, up to the point of the flood seems correct. The next verse shows that at that point the people no longer ate and drank because the flood came and destroyed them all. The inference is clear that after the “until” the circumstances changed they were reversed.

⁵¹Jack Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 68.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Robertson *Israel*, 179-180.

The case is similar in 1 Cor. 11:26. Robertson is correct in his interpretation that Paul's point was not to stress that a day is coming in which the Lord's Supper no longer will be celebrated his emphasis was on present observance. .But it is still clear from the passage that the Lord's coming changes the situation and the implication is that the memorial feast will no longer be necessary. 1 Corinthians 15:25 is even more clear.

Robertson states:

the stress is not that a day will come in which Christ no longer will reign. Instead the point is that he must continue in reigning until the last enemy is subdued at the resurrection.⁵⁴

An examination of the previous verse though shows that this is exactly the case; there will be a time when Christ does not reign. The emphasis is that there will be a time when Christ "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father." Again, the "until" points to a change, even a reversal of circumstances, not merely the end of a period of time.

The most critical passage for this study due to the similarity of context is left unmentioned by Robertson. Luke 21:24 states: "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Again the indication from the context is that after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, Jerusalem will no longer be trampled underfoot. Once the *terminus ad quem* is reached, there is a new set of circumstances.

"*And so all Israel shall be saved.*" (v. 26a) This verse introduces the new set of circumstances. Robertson's contention is with a reading of the passage as though it were

⁵⁴ Robertson *Israel*, 179-180.

saying: “And *then* all Israel shall be saved.”⁵⁵ In such an interpretation, the *kai houtos* is understood as though it possessed primarily a temporal significance. Robertson is correct in this analysis, but in his examination of Arndt and Gingrich’s lexicon to determine that this has no temporal significance he should have noted the nuances which are listed.⁵⁶ BDAG cites two that have bearing on this passage, first *kai houtos* refers to what precedes.⁵⁷ Now some commentators tend to take this as a reference or conclusion to Paul’s preceding discussion. Robertson does this as well. As he correctly defines the term as “in this manner” or “in this way” he relates it to what was said prior to v. 25.⁵⁸ Further Robertson contends that the manner Paul is referring to is “the fantastic processes of God’s salvation among the Jews as he [Paul] had described them.”⁵⁹ Dunn expands on this by arguing that Israel’s restoration is the result of being jealous of the Gentiles enjoyment of their rightful blessings.

The second category listed in BDAG fits this passage even better. In many passages *houtos* refers not to the preceding but to what follows. This is especially true when it introduces spoken or written words (Matt. 2:5; Acts 7:6; 13:34, 47; Rom. 10:6; Hebrews 4:4; it is used this way with *kathos* in Lk. 24:24; and Phil. 3:17). In this sense the passage would be read, “And in the way described by these Old Testament citations, all Israel shall be saved, just as (*kathos*) it is written.” Israel will experience their full and final restoration as a result of the coming of the Deliverer (Isa 59:20 and Psa 14:7 quoted in

⁵⁵ Again, one wishes Robertson had cited sources. Works consulted for this paper failed to produce evidence of this.

⁵⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, s.v., V. 26 (Comments)

⁵⁷ BDAG, 741

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, s.v., V. 26 (Comments)

⁵⁹ Robertson, *Israel*, 182.

Rom. 11:26) This concurs with Old Testament expectations of a future restoration (Deut 30:1–5; Zech. 10:6-8; 12:10; 14:2, 5-10; Mal 3–4.

The second issue Robertson addresses from this phrase concerns the nature of “all Israel.” He argues that “all Israel” refers to all the elect of Israel and refers back to 11:7 for support. For him, all of the elect of Israel will be saved during the present age. The problems with this view is that it is tautological, the elect by definition are always saved- the elect of every age are always saved.

Historically, much ink has been spilled over this one passage and it is beyond the scope of this paper to critique each of the five suggested interpretations. Robertson lists the interpretations as: 1) all ethnic descendants of Abraham, 2) all ethnic descendants of Abraham living when God initiates a special working among the Jewish people, or 3) the mass or at least the majority of Jews living at the time of a special saving activity of God, 4) all elect Israelites within the community of Israel, or 5) both Jews and Gentiles who together constitute the church of Christ, the Israel of God. The view Robertson critiques is the fourth view that all Israel refers to the mass or majority of Jews living at the time the hardening is lifted.

Robertson raises a problem which he claims “cannot be dismissed very easily.”⁶⁰ It is based on his previous discussion that hardening is the “historical outworking of reprobation.”⁶¹ The problem with this analysis was noted earlier. He argues that if one Israelite of the time when the hardening is lifted is lost then the principle of hardening would still be active. Therefore, either every single Israelite must be saved, or it is not “all.” However, he argues, this runs aground of the manner in which God has worked

⁶⁰ Robertson, “Romans 11,” 223; not stated in *Israel*.

⁶¹ Robertson, *Israel*, 183.

historically. He has never obligated himself to save every single individual of a particular group of people.

Robertson fails to adequately deal with the view that “all Israel” means every Jew at the Second Advent. By failing to take into account passages which describe the massive Tribulation judgments and deaths as well as the purging judgments of Messiah at His return, he fails to recognize that only Jews positive to Jesus warning to flee to the mountains are those available for salvation at the end. Others are destroyed in these judgments (Dan 12:10-12; Mal 3-4). All those left are those who have trusted in Jesus as Messiah and are thus saved.

His second objection, which in reality must be admitted cannot be a problem for a sovereign God, is that it is almost impossible to determine who would be an Israelite. While this last objection may lack merit, the first is reasonable. Robertson then asserts his case that “all Israel” describes all elect people within the community of Israel.

By the process described in the earlier verses of Romans 11, all elect Jews shall be saved. As particular members of the Jewish community are “moved to jealousy” when they observe Gentiles receiving the promises of the old covenant, they are grafted into the true community of God.⁶²

This clearly fits Robertson conclusions on the passage, but does not fit with the details of the passage.

This time of this salvation is related to the eschatological coming of the Messiah. It occurs (v. 29) when the New Covenant is established with Israel (Jer. 31:31-34). So the “until” of v. 25, by way of the correlative use of *houtos* relates the former verse to the eschatological establishment of the covenant with Israel when, as a nation they experience national salvation and forgiveness.

⁶² Ibid., 186.

Robertson concludes by stating that the threefold use of *nun* in verses 30, 31 indicates that just as the Gentiles are *now* being shown mercy so at the present time the elect of Israel are being shown mercy. These verses restate the basic ideas of verses 11, 12, 15, 28 that the hardening of a group of Israelites set up a group of Gentiles who were disobedient to receive mercy, their reception of mercy in turn sets up Israelites to receive mercy. Both are disobedient, both need mercy. God has shown all to be in need of sovereign grace. What beautiful symmetry and theology!

Robertson's inclusion of the third *nun* in verse 31 is dubious since it is only attested by \aleph and B, whereas p⁴⁶, and A, along with the Majority text supports its absence.⁶³ To interpret it as meaning that the salvation of the disobedient Israelites takes place in the present age, fails for three reasons. First, it runs foul of the clear teaching with regard to a future for Israel in the text. Second, it is included in a summary statement that by nature need not be pressed for that sort of exactness. Third, its use can be explained on the basis of Paul's understanding of the eschatological as present. Cranfield remarks:

The truth is rather that Paul sees the time which begins with the gospel events and extends to the Parousia as a unity. It is all the eschatological now.⁶⁴

Thus, verses 30–32 are a summary of the whole activity of God and not to be taken to mean that all of these events occur in the present time.

Conclusion and Summary

⁶³ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, Second Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). Metzger notes "A preponderance of early and diverse witnesses favors the shorter reading." Yet he nevertheless opts for inclusion in the UBS4, yet in brackets; he identifies it as a "C" reading, which means the editors are even less certain of its inclusion than in the earlier UBS2 which identified it as a "B" reading.

⁶⁴ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:586.

Robertson has argued that there are a number of indications in the text of Rom. 11 to God's present work among ethnic Israel. While this does not necessarily deny a future work of God among ethnic Israel, for him it strongly suggests that the passage should be re-evaluated. On the basis of his exegetical work he has concluded that the events of God's work among ethnic Israel described in Romans 11 should be understood to take place totally within the context of the present Church age. An evaluation of Robertson's arguments and evidence suggests that his position is untenable. In places he ignored critical passages (i.e., Rom. 11:7). At other times he failed to identify the antecedents of pronouns, he also failed to define the groups in question and to support and define exegetically the elements in the olive tree analogy. The detailed exegesis he did offer did not necessarily support his conclusions (i.e., his work on "until" and "and thus"). It is also suggested that his argument would have been helped if he had identified some of the interpretations he was arguing against and if he had interacted more specifically with premillennial or dispensational writers. The points covered in this paper seem to clearly demonstrate that the focus of Romans 11 is that God has not cast away His people and will deal with Israel in the future in a way that is distinctively different than the way He is currently dealing with them.

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In Paul's figure of the olive tree, its root and branches Ro 11:16-18. ⁶⁵