

We are coming to the close of this series where we have been examining the salvation of the Gentiles during the Acts period. We are considering Romans 11:25-26 where the phrase “fullness of Gentiles (nations)” occurs.

Rom 11:25 For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, lest you should be wise within yourselves; that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until **the fullness of the nations** has come in.

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

At the time of writing Romans, Israel remained as God’s people. They were stumbling in the hardness and blindness God had placed upon them. God had hardened the nation of Israel as an act of mercy, see Roms.9:15-16 and 11:28-32. It is very important to note that in Romans Paul is not speaking of anything new, but anticipating Israel’s restoration and salvation, see Roms.3:3-4a, 9:4-5, 11:12, 15 and 26-29. Paul affirms in Romans that “all Israel will be saved” not the exact opposite that God will bring in something new which has nothing to do with Israel.

Last lesson we considered the “fullness of the Gentiles” as being the final dominant Gentile power over Israel and Jerusalem and the lawless King who leads its armies. We noticed that according to prophecy, the Lord returns to deliver Israel after the “sudden destruction” this evil one brings, see 1Thess.5:3 and 2Thess.2:3-4. When the Lord returns He reigns over the world out of Zion and so Israel will indeed be delivered and saved after the ultimate Gentile power is destroyed.

Two more alternatives are offered today as to what “fullness of the Gentiles” might mean and ultimately it is up to you dear reader to decide the best interpretation from the context.

The first consideration places two similar phrases side by side. The “fullness of the gentiles” and “the fullness of Israel” as found in Romans 11:11-12 & 25-26. Please find and consider the structure found on this link <http://bibleunderstanding.com/pastissues.htm> You will find the chart beside lesson number 44.

Here are these verses in parallel;

Rom 11:11 And so I ask, "They have not stumbled so as to fall, have they?" Of course not! On the contrary, because of their stumbling, **SALVATION** has come to the gentiles to make the Jews jealous.

Rom 11:12 Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their fall means riches for the gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion (**FULLNESS**) mean! ISV.

Rom 11:25 For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, lest you should be wise within yourselves; that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until **the FULLNESS of the nations** has come in.

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be **SAVED**;

The Gentiles, who had been previously cast aside by God, had received salvation during the Acts period because of Israel’s stumbling. Way back in Genesis 10-11, the Gentiles were scattered at Babel with Israel in the centre, see Genesis 10:32, 11:8-9 and Deut.32:8-9. Now this had been reversed. The cast off Gentiles were now accepted by God because Israel had stumbled and had found “fullness”. The Gentiles were made righteous by grace and looked forward to the hope of that time which was Christ REIGNING as King over them, see Roms.15:12 & Isaiah 11.

Now look at Paul’s arguments in Romans 11;

Rom 11:30 For as you also then disbelieved God, but now have been shown mercy through their disbelief,

Rom 11:31 even so these also have not believed now, so that through your mercy they may also obtain mercy.

Rom 11:32 For God has shut up all in unbelief, so that He might show mercy to all.

Israel was stumbling, hardened and blinded by God, but not as a permanent casting aside, rather as an act of mercy. Israel had not found righteousness and salvation but they would find it at the Lord’s return. They would find “fullness”; righteousness, salvation and acceptance by God when the deliverer came out of Zion as their King of Kings, restoring the Kingdom to them.

Can we see this parallel? In the past the Gentiles had not received mercy but were receiving it during the Acts period and so were accepted and filled full with Israel’s blessings. The Gentiles were accepted because Israel

was in unbelief. But Israel would also be accepted because of that very mercy shown to the Gentiles. The key in this mercy exchange is Israel, not the bringing in of something new.

Paul rejoiced at the conclusion of Romans 11 as he praised God's faithfulness. Paul knew that because God is faithful to His Word Israel would be filled full with all He had promised her. Consider these verses please and follow the theme which is God's faithfulness to Israel despite its rejection of Christ;

Rom 3:3 What if some of them were unfaithful? Their unfaithfulness cannot cancel God's faithfulness, can it?

Rom 3:4 Of course not! ISV.

Rom 9:3 For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

Rom 9:4 who are Israelites; to whom *belong* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises;

Rom 9:5 whose *are* the fathers, and of whom *is* the Christ according to flesh, He being God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Rom 9:6 Not however that the Word of God has failed,

Rom 9:15 For He said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Rom 9:16 So then *it is* not of the *one* willing, nor of the *one* running, but of God, the *One* showing mercy

Rom 11:11 And so I ask, "They have not stumbled so as to fall, have they?" Of course not! ISV.

Rom 11:12 But if their slipping away *is* the riches of *the* world, and their default is *the* riches of *the* nations, how much more their fullness?

Rom 11:15 For if their casting away *is* the reconciling of *the* world, what *is* the reception except life from *the* dead?

Rom 11:16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, also the branches.

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved;

Rom 11:29 For the free gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

Rom 11:32 For God has shut up all in unbelief, so that He might show mercy to all.

The Gentiles had been saved during the Acts period and had been filled with blessing and hope. Despite Israel's rejection and unfaithfulness, Israel also would be filled with blessing when their hope is realized; when Christ returned. His return was expected at that time when both Gentiles and Jews would find their joy complete by God's faithfulness to His Word of Promise to Israel. God had promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations and Paul writes about this in Romans. 4:10-22. Abraham's son (foreseen in Isaac) did suffer on that cross but He would reign over Israel and the nations out of Zion.

The fullness of the Gentiles could be the bringing back into acceptance of them, their salvation, their blessing and hope, all in Christ, Israel's Priest King. The fullness of Israel is the sure and certain hope Paul held during Acts that they too would be brought back into acceptance from their stumbling hardened condition, they would be saved and blessed and their hope realized through their Priest King.

The second consideration of the "fullness of the Gentiles" is related to this concept above. The Gentiles were saved during Acts only because Israel was stumbling, and the Gentiles were saved to provoke Israel to jealousy as this verse shows;

Rom 11:11 And so I ask, "They have not stumbled so as to fall, have they?" Of course not! On the contrary, because of their stumbling, salvation has come to the gentiles to make the Jews jealous.

This provocation purpose is drawn out by Paul in his use of the Olive tree as an agricultural example. Please read Roms.11:16-24. Readers might be interested to know there was a gardening book published about AD 40 which spoke of grafting wild olive branches into the unfruitful tree to stimulate it to fruit bearing. However, the olive orchardist would know there is a limit to the wild olive branches one could graft in, just as there is a limit to the number of grafts used on a wild lemon stock. Thus the fullness of the Gentiles could refer to the number of Gentiles necessary to bring Israel to bear fruit; to provoke them to repentance, even a jealous one. In this matter it is interesting to note the record of Luke in Acts 13:

Act 13:46 But speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary *for* the Word of God to be spoken to you first. But since indeed you put it far from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the nations.

Act 13:47 For so the Lord has commanded us, *saying*, "I have set You to be a light of the nations, for salvation to the end of the earth."

Act 13:48 And hearing, the nations rejoiced and glorified the Word of the Lord. And as many as were **ordained** to eternal life believed.

Paul tells us in Romans 9:18 that God will have mercy on those He decides to show mercy, and while I am not suggesting God chooses all who will be saved, He had a purpose in view with the salvation of the Gentiles during Acts. The fullness of the Gentiles could refer to the number required to bring about Israel's response, how many wild olive branches would it take to stimulate the tree to fruit bearing.

Next lesson we will bring this series to a conclusion. May the Lord bring you a harvest of knowledge as you search the Scriptures daily.