Romans 11:26: A Biblical & Historical Correction of the Dispensational View

Introduction

In the world of evangelical Christianity—especially among premillennial dispensationalists—Romans 11:26 is frequently cited to argue that there is a future event in which all ethnic Jews will come to faith in Christ during a final tribulation period. According to this interpretation, modern Jews—considered by dispensationalists to be the direct descendants of Jacob—will collectively turn to Jesus as the Messiah and thus fulfill Paul's words: *"And so all Israel shall be saved."*

But this position rests on a pair of fragile assumptions: first, that those who are called "Jews" today are in fact the ethnic, genealogical descendants of Jacob (Israel); and second, that God still has a distinct redemptive plan for national Israel apart from the Church. When both the Scriptures and historical evidence are examined, however, these assumptions fall apart. The result is a more biblically faithful and theologically sound understanding of who "Israel" truly is, and what Paul meant when he said that "all Israel shall be saved."

The Dispensational Interpretation of Romans 11:26

Dispensationalists read Romans 11:26 through a lens that divides history into epochs ("dispensations") and insists on a

sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. They claim that “all Israel” refers exclusively to ethnic Jews who, after the Church is raptured, will be converted during a seven-year tribulation before Christ’s millennial reign.

This interpretation hinges entirely on the assumption that **modern Jews are ethnic Israelites**, direct descendants of the twelve tribes of Jacob. But is this true?

Paul’s Redefinition of Israel: Not All Israel Is Israel

Paul himself undermines the ethnic interpretation in **Romans 9:6**:

> *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” (KJV)*

This verse affirms that physical descent from Abraham or Jacob does not automatically make someone a true Israelite in God’s eyes. Paul continues in **Romans 9:8**:

> *“That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”*

God’s covenant promise is not inherited through **blood**, but through **faith**—as Paul also teaches in **Galatians 3:7**:

> *“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.”*

In this light, Romans 11:26 must refer not to a future physical nation but to the **full number of God’s elect**—Jew and Gentile—who come to salvation through Christ.

The Historical Loss of Ethnic Israel's Identity

The historical claim that today's Jews are pure descendants of Jacob cannot be sustained:

- **Edomite Integration**: In the second century B.C., under **John Hyrcanus**, the Edomites (descendants of Esau) were forcibly converted to Judaism and absorbed into the population of Judea (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.9.1).
- **Intermarriage and Captivity**: From the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities onward, much of Israel intermarried with foreign nations. Even Ezra and Nehemiah confronted this problem (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13).
- **Herodian Lineage**: Herod the Great, the Roman-installed king of the Jews during Christ's birth, was himself an **Edomite**, not an Israelite.
- **Modern Admixture**: Genetic studies and historical records (e.g., Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*) show that many modern Jewish populations (Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi) include converts, intermarried lineages, and non-Jacobite ancestry, including **Khazars** and **Edomites**.

If the identity of ethnic Israel has been **lost or diluted**, then the dispensational claim that God will save "all Israel" in the future based on a pure bloodline is historically and theologically **untenable**.

Christ's Lineage Was the Only One Preserved

The only **preserved genealogical line** that mattered for redemption was that of **Christ Himself**, traced in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Jesus, the true Seed of Abraham and Son of David, was the fulfillment of God's covenant promises (Galatians 3:16).

All other physical lineages—whether from the Northern or Southern Kingdom—served their purpose until the coming of Christ, the one in whom God's people are now united.

The Grafting Principle in Romans 11

Paul's metaphor of the **olive tree** in Romans 11:17–24 shows that:

- Some natural branches (unbelieving Jews) were **broken off**.
- Wild branches (believing Gentiles) were **grafted in**.
- Only those who continue in faith will remain in the tree.

This image reinforces the idea that **membership in "Israel" is not determined by race or genealogy**, but by **faith in Christ**.

Conclusion: Who Is "All Israel"?

The phrase *"And so all Israel shall be saved"* (Romans 11:26) does **not** point to a future mass conversion of ethnic Jews during a tribulation. Rather, it reflects the fullness of God's elect—Jew and Gentile alike—who together make up the

true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

Scripture consistently affirms this:

> *“There is neither Jew nor Greek… for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)*

> *“If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:29)*

The dispensational hope in a future salvation of a national Israel built on bloodline is not only **historically flawed**, but **theologically misguided**. The gospel makes no distinction between races. God’s covenant people are now and always have been those who are **in Christ**.

Final Remarks

In a time when many Christians are being swayed by political Zionism and ethnic-centered prophecy, we must return to **biblical definitions**. “Israel” is not a nation-state or a racial group—it is a **people redeemed by Christ**, whether Jew or Gentile, called according to God’s purpose.

Romans 11 is not about a second plan for national Israel; it’s about the **one plan of God** fulfilled in the **one body of Christ**. There is **one olive tree**, **one Shepherd**, **one fold** (John 10:16). And all who belong to Christ—regardless of genealogy—are part of that promise.

Three Reformed Views on Romans 11:26

Examination of Each View Biblically & Theologically

Let’s examine each view biblically and theologically, and then determine which interpretation aligns best with the entire context of Romans and the broader teaching of Scripture.

View 1: *Future Conversion of Ethnic Israel (Mass Conversion View)*

Summary:
“All Israel” refers to a future, large-scale conversion of ethnic Jews (though not necessarily every individual Jew) after “the fullness of the Gentiles” has come in. This is considered a yet-future event, often supported by theologians such as John Murray, Charles Hodge, and Gerhardus Vos.

Biblical Defense Claimed:

- Based on a chronological reading of Romans 11:25–26.
- Assumes “Israel” consistently refers to ethnic Israel throughout the chapter.
- Suggests a climactic event at the end of the age when Jews en masse turn to Christ.

Problems:

1. **Assumes a Clear Ethnic Lineage**: As previously discussed, most modern Jews cannot trace a clear lineage to Jacob. Many are of mixed heritage—Edomite, Khazarian, or converts—making this ethnic-based interpretation problematic (cf. *Ezra 9–10; Josephus, Antiquities 13.9.1*).
2. **Violates Immediate Context**: Romans 9:6 already redefines Israel: *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”* Paul distinguishes between ethnic descent and

the elect.
3. **Ignores the Olive Tree Metaphor**: In Romans 11:17–24, the tree (Israel) includes both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. There's one tree, not two separate plans.
4. **Contradicts Galatians 3:28–29**: In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. *"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."*

 Conclusion: This view is overly literal and tied to an assumption of preserved ethnic purity. It also risks reviving a two-covenant or two-people theology, which contradicts Paul's gospel.

View 2: *All Israel = The Elect Church (Jew and Gentile)*

Summary:
"All Israel" is a **spiritual** designation referring to the total number of the elect—both Jews and Gentiles—who make up the Church throughout history. This is the **olive tree** in Romans 11.

Biblical Strengths:

1. **Contextual Harmony**:
   - Romans 9:6–8: True Israel are the children of promise.
   - Romans 11:17–24: One olive tree, one people of God.

2. **Paul's Theology Elsewhere**:
   - Galatians 6:16: *"The Israel of God"* refers to believers in Christ.
   - Galatians 3:7: *"They which are of faith, the same*

are the children of Abraham.”

3. **Christ-Centered Covenant Fulfillment**:
    - Christ is the seed (Gal. 3:16), and all in Christ are heirs of the promise.
    - Ephesians 2:14-16: Jew and Gentile are made *“one new man”* in Christ.

Historical Advocates: John Calvin, O. Palmer Robertson (later in his career).

 Conclusion: This view is the most consistent with Pauline theology, the unity of God’s people, and the redefinition of Israel in light of the gospel. It avoids ethnocentrism and rests on faith in Christ as the only true qualification for belonging to God’s covenant people.

View 3: *All Israel = Elect Jews Throughout History (Remnant View)*

Summary:
“All Israel” refers to the **sum total of elect Jews**—past, present, and future—whom God has saved and will save throughout redemptive history. It is distinct from Gentiles but refers only to the believing remnant among the Jews.

Biblical Support:

- Romans 11:1–5 speaks of a *remnant* of Israel according to grace.
- Suggests “Israel” in 11:26 remains ethnic in reference, but limited to the elect.

Strengths:

- Maintains ethnic reference without demanding mass future conversion.
- Recognizes the ongoing saving of Jews individually throughout history.

Weaknesses:

1. **Disjointed with Paul's Olive Tree Analogy**:
    - Paul emphasizes unity, not parallel groups.
    - Grafting implies full inclusion in one tree.

2. **Continues Ethnic Distinction**:
    - Risks maintaining two identities within the church—believing Gentiles and believing Jews—as separate categories.

3. **Less Support from Galatians**:
    - Galatians 3 and 6 suggest that Jewish identity is absorbed into Christ's body, not preserved as a distinct group.

Conclusion: This view is better than the first but weaker than the second. It does not affirm mass national conversion but still maintains a subtle ethnic priority. It partially captures the biblical picture but misses the full covenantal unity expressed in Christ.

Final Analysis: The Second View Is Most Biblically Accurate

Why View 2 Is Correct:

- It best reflects **Paul's argument in Romans 9–11**, which moves from Israel's failure to the inclusion of the Gentiles, culminating in a united covenant people.
- It preserves the **continuity of God's covenant** without reverting to ethnic categories that Christ fulfilled and transcended.
- It aligns with the **New Testament teaching of the one body of Christ** (Eph. 4:4–6, Gal. 3:28).
- It sees **Romans 11:26** not as a prophecy of mass conversion but as the climax of God's plan to save all His elect from every nation—including Jews—through the gospel.

Why the Other Two Fail:

- View 1 misreads ethnicity into a redemptive promise now fulfilled in Christ.
- View 3 still retains ethnic boundaries post-Christ and misapplies the idea of remnant in a way that keeps Jew/Gentile distinction beyond its biblical purpose.