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Romans

**Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,
And bow down their back always. Romans 11:10**

Here we have a continuation of the quote from verse 9 which is found in the 69th Psalm -

"Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;
And make their loins shake continually."

Like the previous verse, these words are not an imprecation by Paul, but rather are declarations of what will come about because of the Jewish rejection of Christ. And they have certainly been fulfilled literally in the past 2000 years. In a direct quote, the first half of the verse states, "Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see." This isn't speaking of literal blindness, but the spiritual blindness which shows a complete lack of discernment about the issue of Jesus.

This blindness is a self-inflicted wound. They rejected Jesus and sent Him to the cross, but they still had a chance to repent of their ways and acknowledge His lordship, proven by the resurrection. Instead, they willingly kept the matter under wraps. Matthew 28:11-15 shows us the beginning of this deception -

"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had

assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

The blindness was there before the crucifixion and it remains even now. Jesus stated the reason for this by His own mouth -

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19

The people would rather be blind and live in darkness than see and be in the light. What they desired, they received. Thus the declaration of the psalm is fulfilled in a self-inflicted manner, once again showing that condemnation is both a choice and yet is deserved by all. One must willingly choose the light by accepting Christ as Scripture reveals Him. Faith then is a step into light, not a blind leap within the darkness.

The second half of the quote diverts from the Hebrew which states, "make their loins shake continuously." Instead, Paul says, "bow down their back always." The sense is actually the same. When one is given a heavy burden to carry, their loins will shake from the strain of the load. The result of that strain is to be bowed down. The Greek word means "to bend together." The idea is that because of the heavy load, they will bend completely in half.

This picture is one of servitude and bondage. The master directs the load; the slave carries it. This load has been the continued burden of both the law and all of the additions which have been added to it. The burden of the observant Jew is simply overwhelming, so much so that many Jews have simply turned and become completely secular. Rather than the freedom which is found in Christ, there is the self-inflicted bondage of the law. Again, this is certain because Jesus specifically offered a better way -

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Life application: Christ is the fulfillment and end of the law for all who believe. For those who reject Him, there is only bondage, disillusionment, and blindness. Be sure to tell those who haven't heard the good news that in Him there is an easy yoke with a light burden.

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Romans 11:11

Paul asks an obvious question based on verses 7-10 and words it in the form of an objection, "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?" He has already demonstrated that God has not cast away his people by showing that there was a faithful remnant at his time. What about the future? When this remnant generation has passed, what then?

To "stumble that they should fall" implies that eventually they will hit the ground and not be able to get back up. This isn't the case at all. It is neither absolute nor is it permanent. It isn't absolute because there was and continues to be a remnant. It isn't permanent because the Old Testament promises were to national Israel, not the church. They can only find their fulfillment in the land of Israel and in the people of Israel.

Yes, they have stumbled, but they will be able to stand aright once again; they have not fallen entirely. As an emphatic way of demonstrating this, he exclaims, "Certainly not!" Other versions state this widely translated term, "God forbid!" or "May it never be!" etc. And the reason, as amazing as it may seem, is given, that "...through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles."

God's promises to national Israel are not transferable. They are unconditional in the sense that they will be fulfilled, but they are conditional in the sense that they will not be fulfilled until Israel is found to be in a state of obedience. This goes back to the promises and curses of Leviticus 16 and Deuteronomy 28. And so, in His infinite wisdom, God determined to use the salvation of the Gentiles as a point of provocation to Israel, to bring them to national repentance.

As clear as Paul's statement is here, it's astonishing to see how many people can't see this and instead come up with an endless stream of excuses and ideologies which attempt to show how Israel has, in fact fallen entirely. But what is written is clear - "through their fall" meaning the Jews, "salvation has come to the Gentiles." The term gentile is applied to anyone on earth other than a Jew. To all people groups, salvation is now offered. This salvation is apart from the law which Christ fulfilled. Now salvation is applied to any who place their faith in Him.

And this marvelous gift has been granted in order "to provoke" the Jews to jealousy. It's been a long 2000 year period and throughout it some have been provoked, thus making up the remnant God has faithfully preserved. At some point in the future, this remnant will turn into a national movement and "all Israel will be saved."

Life application: A day is coming when Christ will return and rule in the midst of His people, national Israel. Today, they haven't called on Him, but yet He has returned them in preparation for that wondrous time. Remember to pray for and support Israel. The times are coming to their fulfillment as is evidenced by the return of this wayward group to their ancient homeland.

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! Romans 11:12

Again, Paul's words to us in this verse show brightly and clearly, even to the doubter, that there was a plan for the return of the Jewish people - as a collective whole - to a right standing with the Lord. He just got done telling the gentiles (to

whom he is the apostle) that Israel certainly hadn't stumbled to a permanent fall. Instead, their stumbling is what allowed the gentiles to be a part of God's plan of salvation. And in turn, the gentile's salvation would "provoke them to jealousy."

This obviously hasn't happened yet, and the state of such a national conversion even now seems unlikely. So what is it that would bring an entire nation to such a point? A good guess would be the rapture of the church. This is an event which is very precisely laid out by Paul in his writings, and which is actually prefigured in the Old Testament. If this occurs, the mindset of Israel may quickly change. A host of gentiles and a remnant of Jewish Christians suddenly disappearing would certainly be a strong impetus for self-reflection.

Regardless of whether this is what happens or not, something will awaken Israel to the truth of their long-rejected Messiah. When they turned their back on Him, it resulted in a fall which has meant "riches for the world." Their loss meant Gentile gain in two ways. First, as God's plan of salvation moved from them to the church. The abundant blessings of Christ have been lavishly poured out upon a people who were not a people.

Secondly, while the land of Israel lay in ruins, the Jews have been scattered about the world. Those nations who received them and tended to them certainly were lavished with God's blessing in accordance with the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those who blessed them, in turn have been blessed.

In both earthly and spiritual matters, their fall has certainly meant riches for the world. It has truly received wealth and abundance during this dispensation. But it is, in fact, only a dispensation, not a permanent arrangement. This is seen in Paul's next words, "...and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" Two contrasting words are used. The first, "failure" is the word *hēttēma*. It indicates a diminishing or a degradation; a removal of their special privileged status. And "fullness" is the word *pleroma*. This is a filling, such as a cup.

What is being relayed is that the current arrangement is temporary. Regardless of how the church perceives itself, there is currently a lack in what should be without the state of Israel being in favor with God. Thus without them, the cup isn't full. Albert Barnes (1798-1870) lived long before the re-establishment of Israel, but he took this passage at face value. Not knowing what God would do after his lifetime, his comments on this verse state, "In what way, or when, this shall be, we know not. But it is easy to see, that if the Jewish people should be converted to the Christian faith, they would have facilities for spreading the truth, which the church has never had without them."

After this, he listed four major reasons why this is so. With relatively few changes in his thoughts, the truth of his comments still hold true. His insights, without realizing there would be a re-gathering of the people to Israel, are worth noting:

"(1) they are scattered in all nations, and have access to all people.

(2) their conversion, after so long unbelief, would have all the power and influence of a miracle performed in view of all nations. It would be seen why they had been preserved, and their conversion would be a most striking fulfillment of the prophecies.

(3) they are familiar with the languages of the world, and their conversion would at once establish many Christian missionaries in the heart of all the kingdoms of the world. It would be kindling at once a thousand lights in all the dark parts of the earth.

(4) the Jews have shown that they are eminently suited to spread the true religion. It was by Jews converted to Christianity, that the gospel was first spread. Each of the apostles was a Jew; and they have lost none of the ardor, enterprise, and zeal that always characterized their nation. Their conversion would be, therefore, to give to the church a host of missionaries prepared for their work, familiar with all customs, languages, and climes, and already in the heart of all kingdoms, and with facilities for their work in advance, which others must gain only by the slow toil of many years."

Life application: If great scholars of the past could anticipate the Jewish conversion to the true faith of Christ, how much more should we who now see the marvel of the re-established nation? Ezekiel 37 shows that Israel would first become a united people again and only after that would they receive the Spirit (verses 11-14). Have faith that God is readying this select group for spiritual re-birth. Pray for them - to see what for so long they have been blinded to.

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,... Romans 11:13

The context of what is being said in Romans 11:13 is important. Paul has been speaking about the Jewish nation's rejection of Christ which resulted in the message going to gentiles. They in turn readily accepted it. Paul's ministry to the gentiles is a ministry for their benefit, but which is ultimately intended to lead back to the conversion of Jews.

In other words, his work should be taken as an interim ministry (albeit of unknown duration). The church has its role during this dispensation, but it is not the end of the story concerning God's kingdom on earth; the restoration of Israel will initiate that. Only when Israel as a nation calls on the Lord will the kingdom age come. This was explained in some detail in the Romans 1:1 commentary.

Paul here first notes his ministry to the gentiles, "I speak to you Gentiles..." He was personally commissioned by Jesus in Acts 9:15. This ministry was to bear the name of Jesus "before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." In his usual custom, when he arrived at a new city, he would first go to the synagogues and speak to the Jewish believers. However, his ministry was unique in that it was intended for gentile instruction. He explicitly states it here... "inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles." This same thought is conveyed time and again in the New Testament, such as in Acts 15:12, Galatians 1:16, Galatians 2:7-8, Ephesians 3:8, 1 Timothy 1:7, 2 Timothy 1:11 and elsewhere.

All of his personal letters are written to gentile churches and gentile peoples - Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Hebrews, which is unnamed, is an explanatory and transitional letter between Paul's church-age letters and those to follow. Its title, "Hebrews", shows that it is intended for a Jewish audience. It is intended to wake them up and show them that the Old Testament is only pointing to the greater work of Christ. The letters by James and Peter, are directed specifically to Jewish believers. John's letters, like his gospel and Revelation, follow a unique path which combine a message to both Jews and Gentiles. Jude follows the example of John.

By noting the structure and layout of the New Testament, Paul's statement becomes quite clear. The message went first to the Jews. After that, Paul was introduced to transition the message to the gentiles, but his writings have the final intent of leading back to the Jews (as will be noted in the coming verses). Because of this astonishing pattern which is beautifully laid out in the structure of the Bible and lived out through Paul, he states, "I magnify my ministry."

His ministry is a turning point in redemptive history which ushered in (so far) 2000 years of gentile conversions. And yet, his writings are intended to have a profound effect on the Jewish people as well, turning their hearts to the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. How is that possible when what he writes is directed to the gentiles? Because eventually it will be understood that the gentiles had it right. How and when the nation of Israel will realize this is yet unknown, but as noted in the Romans 11:12 commentary, it may be the rapture of the church, a tenet taught by Paul. Whatever it is, when it occurs, Israel will finally open their eyes concerning their Messiah, Jesus.

Life application: Paul magnified his ministry, not himself. Everyone has something which can be done for the Lord, but it shouldn't become a point of boasting except in how it glorifies Him.

...if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. Romans 11:14

The process of how salvation occurs is debated over and strange views have arisen throughout the years concerning it. In Genesis 5 it says, "So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." This verse says little about the process which elicited this favored status, but what it does say is sufficient, "Enoch walked with God." It is apparent that this was a volitional act of his free will.

Likewise, in the very next chapter the Bible says, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This was a voluntary turning away from God and it is highlighted by the contrasting fact that "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God." Noah voluntarily chose the right path.

Here in Romans 11:14, we see this concept fully supported by Paul's zeal for his own people, his "countrymen according to the flesh." He just stated in the previous verse that as the apostle to the Gentiles, he magnified his ministry. This was so that, "if by any means" he might "provoke to jealousy those who are" of the Jewish race. Paul's efforts would be utterly futile if free-will wasn't a consideration in our salvation, but it is.

What would be the point of God directing the salvation of people, as the Bible records, if free-will is excluded from the process? If free-will is excluded, why have prophets continuously called out for repentance year after year for millennia? Why meticulously record the generations of humanity, the dispensations of time, and the covenants made between God and man? Why would the prophetic word be issued that a Messiah was coming and then provide countless pictures and patterns for us to study so that we could be sure of who He was when He arrived? And why send apostles and prophets after His coming who then called out and begged for people to hear and receive the truth if God is going to exclude free-will

in the process? Not only does it make no sense, it makes the entire process out to be a sham. It would be the most ineffective manner one could think of.

If God excludes man's free will, none of this would have been necessary. But man bears God's image and he has been given a choice to accept or reject the good news which God has prepared in the sending of His Son. For Paul's broken heart, his people, Israel, had all but rejected this good news and so he was selected by the Lord to be the apostle to the gentiles. The message would continue on and the banner would be passed from Israel to the gentile nations. Paul knew this, but he also knew that his message could still have an effect on his people. It could provoke them to jealousy "and save some of them."

The free will of man isn't excluded in the process of salvation; it is highlighted. The fact that there is a Bible at all shows us that this is so. God hasn't wasted His time. Instead, He has used the most effective way of all to call His creatures back to Himself. It serves the greatest good for the greatest number and it demonstrates wisdom and love for the creatures who have voluntarily turned from Him and whom He desires to voluntarily turn back to Him.

Life application: Salvation is an offer from God and a choice by each person. After salvation, the choices don't stop. Will we choose to grow in Christ or stagnate? Will we worship God at church or sit at home and watch football? Will we read our Bible or play on the computer? Use your post-salvation choices wisely; heavenly rewards and losses await.

For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? Romans 11:15

The introductory conjunction "for" is given to tie verse 15 back to verses 11 and 12 which spoke of the fall and then the fullness of the Jewish people. Verses 13 and 14 were related to Paul's ministry to the gentiles which carries with it the secondary purpose of provoking Israel to jealousy. When this is effected, there will be great things in store for the world.

Paul says, "if their being cast away..." this is their "fall." The nation of Israel failed to believe in Christ's work and so they rejected Him. Because they rejected Him, God rejected them. Their fall though is what meant "reconciling of the world." This ties directly back to verse 12 - "their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles." Paul is restating these things, after the explanation of the purpose and intent of his ministry (that dual-purpose noted above) to demonstrate that something even greater is anticipated in the future.

Here is the thought -

1) Israel was cast away for disobedience; a tragic occurrence.

2) Because of Israel's fall, the greater good would be served by bringing reconciliation between the gentile world and God. The word "reconciling" is the Greek word *katallege*. This word in Romans 5:11 is translated as "atonement" by many translators. The atonement of Christ's shed blood was made possible because the Jews rejected Him. If they had accepted Him, the obvious result would have been the immediate initiation of the Kingdom Age. The Church Age would never have occurred.

3) Therefore, if the fall was tragic, but it led to something wonderful, how much more wonderful will it be when they are restored! What is offered as a question by Paul in some translations is meant as an exclamation.

When Israel finally accepts their long-rejected Messiah, there will be life from the dead. This is taken in two ways by scholars. The first is that it is speaking of the spiritual revitalization of national Israel. They are already once again a people, but they are spiritually dead to the things of God found in Christ. However, a time is prophesied (in numerous Old Testament passages) that they will again be quickened to this spiritual vigor. One key passage is found in Ezekiel 37:11-14 -

"Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it," says the Lord.'"

Based on the surrounding context in this passage from Ezekiel, this is certainly speaking of a spiritual awakening, not a literal resurrection. The banner of all spiritual matters will be passed back to them from the church which had carried it during their time of rejection. However, this is certainly not the only "life from the dead" that Paul is speaking of. Paul's letter is being written to "spiritually alive" people. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit and have the assurance (the guarantee - Ephesians 1:13, 14) of eternal life. If this is true, then Paul's words must have more than just a "national Israel" fulfillment or they would be worded differently.

The truth is that there is a point in prophetic history which will bring about "life from the dead" in a literal sense. It isn't just one single moment, but rather an epoch of time. At first there will be the rapture of the church. This is explained, in detail, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. This is physical life from dead bodies; a resurrection.

At some point, probably due to the rapture, Israel will wake up from their slumber and realize who Jesus really is. This will bring about their spiritual revival - life from the dead. After this, at the ending of the seven-year tribulation, there will be another resurrection from the dead. This is noted in several Old Testament passages and in Revelation. Daniel 12:1-3 speaks of it -

"At that time Michael shall stand up,
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;

And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be delivered,
Every one who is found written in the book.
And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.
Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever."

Isaiah 26:19 hints at this time as well -

"Your dead shall live;
Together with my dead body they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead."

And in the New Testament, John writes of it in Revelation 20:4-6 -

"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

This amazing epoch of time is coming, and probably soon. The graves of Ezekiel 37 have been opened and there is a great standing army in Israel. The ancient prophets noted that only after that happened would they be given the Spirit. It could never have happened before, and it hasn't happened yet, so we are at the cusp of amazing events in world history.

Life application: Though the rapture of the church is dismissed by many theologians, it is explicitly taught in Scripture. One must over-spiritualize much of the Bible to reject what is so carefully recorded for our learning. Israel is back in the land and so these amazing events are coming... may they be soon.