

# Romans 11:19-21 Commentary

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Click chart to enlarge  
Chart from recommended resource [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
[Romans Overview Chart](#) - Charles Swindoll

Source: Dr David Cooper  
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## ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS

[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

[Romans 3:21-5:21](#)

[Romans 6:1-8:39](#)

[Romans 9:1-11:36](#)

[Romans 12:1-16:27](#)

SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	God's Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's chart above				

- R **Ruin** (Romans 1:17 – 3:20) – The utter sinfulness of humanity
- O **Offer** (Romans 3:21-31) – God's offer of justification by grace
- M **Model** (Romans 4:1-25) – Abraham as a model for saving faith
- A **Access** (Romans 5:1-11) – The benefits of justification
- N **New Adam** (Romans 5:12-21) – We are children of two "Adams"
- S **Struggle w/ Sin** (Romans 6:1-8:39) Struggle, sanctification, and victory

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans 3:21-5:21	Romans 6:1-8:39	Romans 9:1-11:36	Romans 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	WORK OF SALVATION

Romans 11:19 You will **say then**, "**Branches** were **broken off so** that I might be **grafted** in." Greek: **ereis (2SFAI) oun, Exeklasthesan kladoi hina ego egkentristho. (1SAPS)**

**Amplified:** You will say then, Branches were broken (pruned) off so that I might be grafted in!

**ESV:** Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

**ICB:** You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I could be joined to their tree."

**NKJV:** You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

**NLT:** "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me."

**Phillips:** You may make the natural retort, "But the branches were broken off to make room for my grafting!"

**Wuest:** You will say then, Branches were broken off in order that I might be grafted in.

**Young's Literal:** Thou wilt say, then, 'The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in;' right!

**YOU WILL SAY THEN BRANCHES WERE BROKEN OFF SO THAT I MIGHT BE GRAFTED IN: ereis (2SFAI) oun**

- Ro 11:11,12,17,23,24

Paul anticipated that in spite of this clear truth, some of his Gentile readers would continue to argue against him.

KJV has "therefore" - Moule comments "in order to meet my reasoning."

The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** explains that "The apostle anticipated the rebuttal a Gentile believer might make: Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in. Though that was not the real reason the branches were broken off, Paul accepted the statement for the sake of argument. Then he pointed out that the real reason the branches were broken off was Israel's unbelief and that any Gentile as a grafted-in branch stands (cf. Ro 5:2-note) by faith. (Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books)

**Thomas Constable** commenting on Ro 11:19-20 adds that "It is true that one of the reasons Gentiles have become partakers of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant is that many of the Jews have not believed. However the Gentile believer who may feel superior to the unbelieving Jew needs to remember that the only reason he is where he is is because he has simply believed God. He is not there because he has done some meritorious work that would be a ground for boasting ([Romans 11 Commentary - Expository Notes](#))

**Ellicott** - In this section the Apostle goes on to consider further the bearings of the rejection, and here, first (Romans 11:11-16), he considers the more hopeful side of it as regards the Jews themselves; their fall was not to be final, and there was every reason to think that their reconversion would more than make up for their fall; secondly (Romans 11:17-24), he turns to the Gentiles and bids them remember how it was that they came to be inserted like a graft in the true theocratic stem, and warns them not to make use of their new privilege to boast against those who were refused to make way for them. ([Romans 11 - Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#))

**Hodges** - The apostle guards against a further ground of self-complacency on the part of the Gentile. Although forced to admit that the root bore him, and not he the root, yet he might pride himself on the fact that the branches were broken off, and he put in their place. To this it is answered, that the Gentiles are not authorized to infer, from the fact that the Jews were rejected, and they chosen, that this occurred on the ground of their being in themselves better than the Jews. The true reason of this dispensation is assigned in the next verse. ([Romans 11 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

**Romans 11:20** [Quite right](#), they were [broken off](#) for their [unbelief](#), but you [stand](#) by your [faith](#). Do not be [conceited](#) \*, but [fear](#);

**Greek:** [kalos: te apistia](#) exeklasthesan, [su de te pistei estekas](#). (2SRAI) [me hupsela phronei](#). (2SPAM) [alla phobou](#): (2SPPM)

**Amplified:** That is true. But they were broken (pruned) off because of their unbelief (their lack of real faith), and you are established through faith [because you do believe]. So do not become proud and conceited, but rather stand in awe and be reverently afraid.

**ESV:** That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

**ICB:** That is true. But those branches were broken off because they did not believe. And you continue to be part of the tree only because you believe. Do not be proud, but be afraid.

**NIV:** Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

**NKJV:** Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

**NLT:** Yes, but remember--those branches, the Jews, were broken off because they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.

**Phillips:** It wasn't quite like that. They lost their position because they failed to believe; you only maintain yours because you do believe. The situation does not call for conceit but for a certain wholesome fear.

**Wuest:** Well! Because of their unbelief they were broken off. But, as for you, by faith you stand. Stop having a superiority complex, but be fearing;

**Young's Literal:** by unbelief they were broken off, and thou hast stood by faith; be not high-minded, but be fearing;

**QUITE RIGHT, THEY WERE BROKEN OFF FOR THEIR UNBELIEF BUT YOU STAND BY YOUR FAITH: kalos: te apistia exeklasthesan (3PAPI) su de te pistei esthkas (2SRAI):**

- John 4:17,18; James 2:19
- Ro 3:3; Acts 13:46,47; 18:6; Hebrews 3:12,19; 4:6,11

- Ro 5:1,2; 2Chronicles 20:20; Isaiah 7:9; 1Corinthians 16:13; 2Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:7; 1Peter 5:9,12

That is true. But they were broken (pruned) off because of their unbelief (their lack of real faith), and you are established through faith [because you do believe]. So do not become proud and conceited, but rather stand in awe and be reverently afraid. (Amplified)

Yes, but remember--those branches, the Jews, were broken off because they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. (NLT)

Granted that Jews were rejected because of their unbelief, but nevertheless there was no personal merit in the Gentiles by which they became recipients of the divine favor. That favor was bestowed on the condition of their faith, and faith excludes boasting (Ro 3:27). Accordingly the real cause of their rejection is sufficient to correct a false inference.

**Quiet Right** (Granted, Well Said, That is true) - **Moule** comments - There is, of course, a solemn and earnest irony in the word ("Well said"). In terms, the Gentile Pharisee (if we may use the expression) spoke truth; for in the mysterious adjustments of the Divine Plan the rejection of Messiah by Israel was to precede, and even in a certain sense to occasion, the call of the Gentiles. But in the *spirit* of the words there was deep untruth; for their own sin was the actual cause of Israel's fall, and Gentile believers were admitted into covenant on just the same terms of mere mercy as their Jewish brethren—i.e. for the sole sake of Messiah the Propitiation; "by faith." ([Romans 11 Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Unbelief** (570)(**apistia** [see word study] from a = without + pistós = believing, faithful) means literally not believing = faithlessness, distrust, lack of belief. It describes an unwillingness to commit oneself to another or respond positively to the other's words or actions.

**Faith** (4102)(**pistis** [see word study]) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. Note that this discussion of *pistis* is only an overview and not a detailed treatise of this vitally important subject.

**Wayne Grudem** defines faith that saves one's soul "Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... The definition emphasizes personal trust in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word "trust" is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word "faith" or "belief." The reason is that we can "believe" something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. ([Grudem, W. A. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Zondervan](#))

**DO NOT BE CONCEITED BUT** (have an attitude of reverential awe) **FEAR: me hupsela phronei (2SPAM) alla phobou (2SPPM):** (Ro 11:18; 12:16; Psalms 138:6; Proverbs 28:26; Isaiah 2:11,17; Habakkuk 2:4; Zephaniah 3:11; Luke 18:14; 2Corinthians 10:5; 2Thessalonians 2:4; 2Timothy 3:3-5; James 4:6; 1Peter 5:5,6; Revelation 3:17; Revelation 18:7) (Proverbs 28:14; Isaiah 66:2; 1Corinthians 10:12; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 4:1; 1Peter 1:17)

Stop thinking so high

Stop having a superiority complex, but be fearing (Wuest)

The situation does not call for conceit but for a certain wholesome fear. (Phillips)

**Conceited** is two words in Greek - (5308) (**hupselós**) which means high or lofty. The second word is (5426) (**phroneo**) which means to think, to have a mindset, to be minded. The activity represented by *phroneo* involves the will, affections, and conscience. The combination means to be high-minded, lofty in mind, proud or arrogant. The **present imperative** with the negative Greek word ("me" = conveys negation) calls for the reader to cease from an attitude that they are presently manifesting (i.e., spiritual arrogance toward the Jews).

**Fear** (5399) (**phobeo** from **phobos** = alarm or fright, fear, terror, reverence, respect, honor) means to cause to run away, to frighten, to terrify, to be alarmed. As used here *phobeo* conveys more the sense of to revere, to reverence or to be in awe of God. The **present imperative** calls for this to be one's lifestyle or habitual practice (which necessitates continually being filled with the Holy Spirit that we might have the supernatural enabling power to accomplish always "fear"-see Eph 5:18-note, Gal 5:16-note)..

If Israel's special calling and blessing from the Lord could not protect them from being broken off, then certainly the Gentiles' lack of that calling and blessing cannot protect them from being broken off for their unbelief.

Therefore you would do well, Paul advises his Gentile readers, to have a righteous holy fear and to strongly resist any temptation to arrogance (Ro 11:18) and conceit (Ro 11:20). If God cut off apostate Israel because of her unbelief, how much more surely will He

cut off an apostate church because of unbelief.

As alluded to in a previous comment, this is a warning the "Church" has failed to heed as manifest by the evolution of allegorical interpretation of Scripture by the early church fathers such as Origen so that by the time of Augustine this respected and influential teacher taught that Israel was replaced by the Church, in this case the Roman Catholic church. And so it went for the first 1000 years and thus Jews were often despised and hated and persecuted by the very ones who Paul is clearly stating should have known better. Probably few of these were truly saved but only pretending to be "Christians", although even such revered saints as Martin Luther in his later years published vitriolic diatribes against the Jews even calling for their tongues to be torn out if they did not convert! (See a [sample link](#) from a non-believing Jewish source)

When we leave the (real) **Literal** we enter the **surreal** and we are in the land of "**science fiction**" with all sorts of fantastic interpretations and vain imaginings, the end of which is potentially deception and destruction.

**Hodges** - Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, etc. The fact that they were broken off is admitted, but the inference drawn by the Gentiles is denied. It was not for any personal considerations that the one was rejected and the other chosen. The Jews were rejected because they rejected the Savior, and the only tenure by which the advantages of a covenant relation to God can be retained is faith. The Gentiles will not be secure, because Gentiles, any more than the Jews were safe, because Jews. Instead, therefore, of being high-minded, they should fear. ([Romans 11 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

**Steven Cole** - WE SHOULD FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE PRONE TO DRIFT FROM JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE INTO JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS. One reason the Jews were cut off from salvation is that they sought to establish their own righteousness by keeping the law (Ro 9:31-32; 10:3). But now that the Gentiles have graciously been grafted into God's promise to Abraham, they turn around and are arrogant towards the unbelieving Jews. They were forgetting that if God had not been merciful, they would still be in their sins. And they were forgetting that they only stood by faith (Ro 11:20), not by their works. As we've seen, if salvation is by faith then it is not of works, or we would boast. Spiritual pride subtly creeps in and makes us want to take at least some of the credit for our salvation, so that we even boast in our faith. ([Guarding Against Spiritual Pride](#))

#### Related resources...

- [Summary on the Attributes of God](#)
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#### Online Book by Dr John Walvoord - Israel in Prophecy

- [Chapter I The New State Of Israel](#)
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- [Chapter III Israel's Future As A Nation](#)
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- [Chapter V The Kingdom Promised To David](#)
- [Chapter VI The Suffering Of Israel](#)
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#### Online Articles by Arnold Fruchtenbaum related to Israel

- [Israelology: Part 1 of 6 Introduction: Definition of Terms](#)
- [Israelology: Part 2 of 6 Israel Present \(Note: Article begins on Page 2\)](#)
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- [Israelology: Part 4 of 6 - Israel Future \(Part One\)](#)
- [Israelology: Part 5 of 6 - Israel Future \(Part Two\)](#)
- [Israelology: Part 6 of 6 Other Relevant Topics - Illustrations of Israel \(including marriage\)](#)

**Are you confused about God's plan for Israel?** Then I highly recommend Tony Garland's 12 Hour Course on **Romans 9-11** in which he addresses in depth the question of **What Will Happen to Israel?** ([click](#)) or see the individual lectures below)

- [Romans 9:1-5 Paul's Sorrow Concerning Israel](#)
- [Romans 9:6-13 Children of the Promise](#)
- [Romans 9:14-24 The Potter and the Clay](#)
- [Romans 9:25-33 A Remnant Will be Saved](#)
- [Romans 10:1-13 The Righteousness of God](#)
- [Romans 10:14-21 Has Israel Not Heard?](#)
- [Romans 11:1-6 God Has Not Cast Away The Jews](#)
- [Romans 11:7-15 Life from the Dead](#)
- [Romans 11:16-24 Two Olive Trees](#)
- [Romans 11:25-36 The Salvation of Israel](#)

Note that when you click the preceding links, each link will in turn give you several choices including an **Mp3 message** and brief transcript notes. The Mp3's are long (avg 70+ min) but are in depth and thoroughly Scriptural with many quotations from the Old Testament, which is often much less well understood than the NT by many in the church today. Garland takes a literal approach to Scripture, and his love for the Jews and passion to see them saved comes through very clearly in these 12 hours of teaching! Take your home Bible Study group through this series if you dare. Take notes on the tapes as the transcripts are a very abbreviated version of the audio messages. This course is highly recommended for all who love Israel! I think you will agree that Tony Garland, despite coming to faith after age 30 as an engineer, clearly has been given a special anointing by God to promulgate the truth concerning Israel and God's glorious future plan for the Jews. Garland has also produced more than 20 hours of superb audio teaching in his verse by verse commentary on the [Revelation](#) (in depth transcripts also available) which will unravel (in a way you did not think was possible considering the plethora of divergent interpretations) God's final message of the triumph and return of the our Lord Jesus Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords! Maranatha (see [Maranatha - In Depth Word Study](#))!

**Romans 11:21 for [if God did not spare the natural branches](#), He will not [spare you, either](#).**

**Greek:** [ei gar o theos ton kata phusin kladon ouk epheisato](#). (3SAMI) [[me pos](#)] [oude sou pheisetai](#). (3SFMI)

**Amplified:** For if God did not spare the natural branches [because of unbelief], neither will He spare you [if you are guilty of the same offense].

**ESV:** For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

**ICB:** If God did not let the natural branches of that tree stay, then he will not let you stay if you don't believe.

**NIV:** For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

**NKJV:** For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

**NLT:** For if God did not spare the branches he put there in the first place, he won't spare you either.

**Phillips:** If God removed the natural branches for a good reason, take care that you don't give him the same reason for removing you.

**Wuest:** for in view of the fact that God did not spare the branches which were according to nature, neither will He spare you.

**Young's Literal:** for if God the natural branches did not spare -- lest perhaps He also shall not spare thee.

**FOR IF GOD DID NOT SPARE THE NATURAL BRANCHES NEITHER WILL HE SPARE YOU: ei gar o theos ton kata phusin kladon ouk epheisato (3SAMI) (me pos) oude sou pheisetai (3SFMI):**

- Ro 11:17,19; 8:32; Jeremiah 25:29; 49:12; 1Corinthians 10:1-12; 2Peter 2:4-9; Jude 1:5

Jer 25:29 For behold, I am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth," declares the LORD of hosts.'

1Cor 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 **Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.** 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 **Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.** 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands **take heed** (present imperative = calls for continual guarding of our hearts lest we too fall like Israel did. Flesh is flesh whether it is Old Testament or New Testament flesh!) that he does not fall.

**For** - Always **pause** and **ponder** this small but "strategic" **term of explanation**.

Why did He not spare them? Why were they cut off? Their unbelief. And if God set aside Israel for their unbelief, He could do the same to Gentiles for their pride.

**W E Vine** - High mindedness is the forerunner of stumbling. A privilege granted affords no room for self-glorying. On the contrary there is room for fear of the danger of stumbling, as Israel had done. If the natural descendants of Abraham, and partakers of the blessings of the covenant, were deprived of their privileges through unbelief, verily the Gentile has reason to beware of the danger that God will not spare him, who by nature was a stranger from the covenant of promise (Eph 2:12-note). (Collected Writings of W E Vine)

**Moule** - Persons who were, without any new interposition of mercy, born within the scope of the covenant and the light of revelation. Not that the *state of human nature* was less fallen in Jew than in Gentile, but that the *course of nature* led the Jew, as such, to light and privilege. ([Romans 11 Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Hodges** - The Gentile has even more reason to fear than the Jew had. It was in itself far more probable that God would spare a people so long connected with him in the most peculiar manner, than that he should spare those who had no such claims on his mercy. The idea intended to be expressed by this verse probably is, that the Jews, from their relation to God, were more likely to be spared than the Gentiles, inasmuch as God is accustomed to bear long with the recipients of his mercy, before he casts them off; even as a father bears long with a son, before he discards him and adopts another. ([Romans 11 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))