

~Other Speakers S-Z: George Warnock:

There is much that could be said about God's true Israel, but let us just look briefly at the good Olive Tree as portrayed so beautifully by the apostle Paul. The prophet Jeremiah had said: "The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken" (Jer. 11:16). Now the apostle Paul goes into great detail to describe the fall, and the rising again of Israel; and if we can accept what he has to say about it, the relationship between the Church and Israel becomes very clear. Here in Romans 11 he answers a question that he himself raised: "Hath God cast away his people?"... and his immediate response is "God forbid" (Rom. 11:1). To say that God had rejected Israel he would have to say that he himself was rejected, "For I also am an Israelite" (vs. 1). Then he goes on to explain. God always retained for himself a true Israel, even in times of great apostasy. When Christ came as the total Sum and Substance of Israel's hope He was rejected, and God cast away the unfaithful branches of the Olive Tree. But He did not cut the tree down, He just stripped off the dead branches. Of course this left the Tree almost bare. But Paul explains: the "root" was holy, and therefore the Tree would survive. And wonder of wonders, it would not only survive, it would take on greater beauty and enlargement! How? God would reach forth and take branches from a "wild olive tree" and graft them into the Good Tree. What Tree? Clearly Paul is talking only of two trees: the wild olive tree and the Good Olive Tree; and he tells us that God took branches out of the wild tree and grafted them into the Good one. He took a people in their wild, Gentile condition, and grafted them into the Good Tree of Israel. The Good Tree was almost stripped of its branches, but God caused it to be replenished with "wild" branches from the Gentiles, and the Good Tree flourished once again. It not only flourished, it took on even greater beauty and enlargement; for God had brought about, through the fall of Israel, "the reconciling of the world" (vs. 15). Since then the Gospel of reconciliation has gone forth to the ends of the earth.

But the "root" was holy, and the "branches" were beloved "for the fathers' sakes" (vs. 28). And as the natural, rejected branches of Israel go through their time of desolation and judgment, and God brings them to repentance, and salvation flows forth from Zion, God performs a miracle in these dead branches that is even greater than He performed when He brought "wild" Gentiles into the Good Olive Tree of Israel. He literally gives life to these dead branches, and grafts them back again into the same Good Olive Tree. And once again the Tree takes on beauty and still greater enlargement. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead" (vs. 15). Was the true Israel, then, ever rejected by God? Never was! And never will be! "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written" (vs. 26). It couldn't be more clear. Only the unbelieving branches of Israel were rejected; only the believing branches from the wild olive tree were grafted into Israel. Then the dead branches "if they abide not still in unbelief" (vs. 23) will be grafted back into their own Tree; and the branches of the Gentiles will remain there with them in the same Tree, if they "continue in God's goodness," otherwise they "also shall be cut off" (vs. 22). Paul's conclusion is: "And so all Israel shall be saved" (vs. 26). And in all that he has spoken about in chapters 9, 10, and 11 he has made it very clear what God means by all Israel. "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (9:6-7). And what does he mean by "in Isaac"? He explains this also, very clearly: "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" (9:8). But God, in His love and faithfulness to the fathers, even though the broken branches are dead in sin, because of "election" he brings them back into the Good Tree... and the tree takes on still greater enlargement and beauty in that great and mighty work of restoration for Israel that Paul simply describes as "life from the dead." "And so all Israel shall be saved," whether they be the wild branches that were grafted in or the dead branches restored to the Tree. Paul very clearly speaks of one true Israel. There is but "one hope," not two; not one for the Church, and another for Israel. "There is no difference," for at the price of His Cross our Lord tore down "the middle wall of partition between us". For what purpose? To make "one new man, so making peace". (See Eph. 2:14-15; 4:4-6.) A restoration to temples, and altars, and candlesticks, and the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a red heifer? No--this would be the greatest of abominations! But this restoration must be something greater, something grander, something far and beyond what we have yet known in the Church and it will come about by the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus, moving in this "one new man" that God made of Jew and Gentile when He tore down the wall of partition. It is this wonderworking wisdom of God that causes the apostle to cry out:

"O the depth of the riches Both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, And his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).