Autor: **Prof. E. F. Ströter (1846-1922)**
Theme: **The Jewish Question and its Divine Solution According to Romans Chapter 11**

Table of Contents:

Preface: The Problem of the Rejection of Israel in Romans Ch. 9-11

Before we start to examine the content of chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Romans, it is advisable to briefly point out the context in which this chapter and its extremely important content stands. We cannot, however, go into detail about the apostle's remarks in the two preceding chapters. A short overview will suffice to let us correctly recognize what ch. 11 is about in context. We believe we can do no better than to simply reproduce what F. Godet so aptly says in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans about this passage and its great theme:

"The apostle, when he gave chap. 1:16, 17, the subject of his treatise, had included in it an element of a historical nature, which he had necessarily to take up again and develop in his writing. It was this: for the Jew first and then for the Greeks. What was the relation of the salvation of the individual, as he had hitherto set it forth, to those two great constituents of mankind? How did it come about that the Jewish people, to whom salvation was primarily destined and who seemed to be best prepared to receive it, showed themselves to be the most rebellious in the face of this revelation of divine mercy? Did not this fact raise a grave objection to the truth of the gospel itself and to the Messiahship attached by the new faith to the person of Jesus? Could not a Jew with some

semblance of truth argue thus: Either the gospel is true and Jesus is really the Messiah; but in that case, what is the meaning of the divine promises once made to the Jewish people, who rejected this very Messiah and his salvation? Or is and remains Israel forever, according to its divine election, the people of God, and in this case the Gospel must be false and Jesus an impostor. So the only choice left was either to affirm God's faithfulness to his own election and deny the gospel - or to affirm the gospel, but by giving the lie to the divine election and faithfulness.

"As often as the apostle preached the gospel, this problem had to come in his way, and in his exposition of salvation <which comes by faith without the law> a significant gap would have remained if he had not presented a solution, in keeping with the nature of God, to the greatest riddle posed by history: the rejection of the chosen people.

.... "The field which the apostle here enters is one of the most difficult and profound that can present itself to the human mind. It is that of theodicy, the justification of the divine government in the course of human affairs. But he does not enter it as a philosopher and according to its full extent; he treats it only in relation to one particular point, the problem of the destiny of Israel, and he does it in the consciousness of thus fulfilling his profession as an apostle.

.... "It is not his mission, still less his person, which Paul seeks to defend in sketching this comprehensive picture of the ways of God; it is rather God himself and his work of salvation in mankind. He endeavors to dispel the shadow which the unexpected, mysterious fact of the break with his ancient people and the entry of the Gentiles into the position of the chosen people could cast on the truthfulness and faithfulness of God.... It was indeed for the church one of the most important questions in the time of its foundation. In it centered the question of the relationship of the two revelations.

"How can God, at a given moment, reject a people whom He has chosen? Is this fact possible? The apostle solves this problem by taking three different points of view in order of consideration: 1. That of God's absolute liberty as against any pretended right which man might have acquired towards him; this is the subject of chap. 9;- 2. That of the lawfulness of the use which God has made of his liberty in the case in question; this is the subject of chap. 10, where Paul proves that Israel has brought upon itself the lot by which it is affected, through its own lack of understanding; - 3. That of the usefulness of this so unexpected measure; this is the subject of chap. 11, where the beneficent consequences of Israel's rejection are rolled up to their glorious final result. - This section, it is true, does not sum up the whole story, but it is the most beautiful specimen and, as it were, the masterpiece of this science. "

The Core of the Jewish Question

V. 1: I say then, has God rejected his people?

Among the many burning questions of our time, the Jewish question rightly occupies a prominent place. It is true that we are not dealing with a people that could compete in numbers with the Indians or the Chinese. But the importance of a people does not lie in its mass. Thus, it is not primarily political problems that are linked to the Jewish question and its solution. Nor are the political interests the highest in the world. Israel is a very peculiar people. Its history so far mocks all attempts to explain it according to the laws of ordinary events on earth. Israel has a calling and an election among the nations, as never another before it or after it. Other nations have asked and searched for God, and He has not left Himself unwitnessed to them (Acts 14:17). But only in Israel and through Israel has the Eternal and True One revealed Himself as such. High words of human wisdom have come down to us from Egypt, Chaldea, India, Greece and Rome. But salvation, the final solution of all human questions for time and eternity, comes from the Jews alone. "To them is entrusted what God has spoken (Rom. 3, 2). Other peoples have ever and then been drawn into the realm of divine revelatory activity, - Israel alone as a people has the distinction of being the actual bearer and

mediator of all God's communication to the rest of mankind. This gives the Jewish question a significance and scope which is not and cannot be inherent in any other question.

What is now commonly treated as the Jewish question in political and sociological papers is in reality only a small section of the mere periphery of the Jewish question. It cannot be denied that this problem is not easy to solve for the peoples, because they do not know how to deal with the sons of Jacob in their midst, or whether they can exploit them politically or economically. But in truth, this is only of secondary importance. The question is not how the nations relate to Israel, but how the Lord, the most high God, who chose Israel, relates to the people of his choice. Whether anti-Semitism is on the decline in Eastern Europe or on the rise in the West is not what constitutes the Jewish question. Its core and center is: Has God rejected his people?

Even the Zionist movement, through which the attention of the world has again been directed to a very special degree to Israel and its efforts for self-help, and which cannot be denied a high and far-reaching significance, has not yet dared to even consider the real core of the Jewish question. It has a purely political character and does not yet want to bear any other. Zionism wants nothing more than the recognition of Jewish nationality on the part of the other peoples of the earth and the public-legal securing of a home for the Jews in the land of their fathers. However, Zionism comes very close to what we have called the center of gravity of the whole matter. It emphasizes with great emphasis the right of the children of Israel scattered throughout the world, in defiance of all Reform Judaism and all Christian unbelief, to be regarded and treated not merely as a denomination but as a people. It will remain the merit of Zionism, whether it is successful or not, to have brought clarity into the whole matter by putting Jews and Christians before the question of the nationhood of Israel. But the Zionist slogan: "We Jews want to become one people again", still needs a small, but immensely serious addition, before it reaches the measure of the question posed here by the apostle. It would have to read: We children of Israel want to become "His people" again, the people of the God of Israel. We see that Zionism is a step in the right direction, but it does not yet open up the heart of the Jewish question.

This is the great, enormous problem: Is Israel's people of God, i.e. its entitlement to a priestly and royal position among the nations, irrevocably and forever over or not? Has the people, whose position among all nations in the divine world household was so unique, as such no longer any prospect at all to be used by God in the future for the execution of his great redemptive thoughts with mankind? Is there for all times only a mission to Israel, in which it does not have to be a question whether its people as such will be taken into account, since it would be exposed to inevitable disintegration and dissolution; - or is there in God's plan and counsel once more a mission for Israel as the people of the Most High to the rest of mankind?

That it is nothing less than this is clear from the apostle's words. His question whether God has rejected his people cannot possibly be interpreted as if Paul wanted to question the Jews' ability to be redeemed as Jews. When he wrote these words to the Jews in Rome, which is an age after the day of Pentecost, there could be no doubt about it at all. After all, the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit had been gloriously demonstrated precisely in Jerusalem, in the midst of the people. Only Jewish men from all parts of the empire had gathered together, from whom the Spirit of God formed the first congregation of the transfigured Lord and Savior in heaven. Furthermore, it is clear to us from the Acts of the Apostles that for a number of years the question was not whether Jews could be saved; but whether the Gentiles, without first accepting circumcision, that is, without first becoming Jews, were to be regarded without further ado as fully entitled co-heirs and partakers of all the blessings of the gospel of Christ. It would be guilty of a complete misunderstanding of the historical and factual context if the apostle were to ask anything other than what the simple literal sense says, namely, whether Israel as a people in the divine council of salvation was over forever or not.

Since Christianity has taken on a thoroughly non-Jewish character for more than fifteen centuries and the believers from the circumcision have not formed their own congregations for just as long, we may easily get the idea that the development of the church as a people's Christian naturally brings with it a gradual, but finally inexorable and complete extinction of the national hope and expectation of Israel. This is probably the most widespread view in Christianity. There is little doubt about the justification and obligation to carry out missions among Israel and to lead as many of this people as possible to the living faith in Christ. Movements, however, such as Zionism, which aim at the revival and resurrection of the Jewish people in its own homeland, are considered by a large number of even Bible-believing Christians to be purely illusory, if not even a rebellion against the supposedly decided downfall of the Jewish nationality as such in the Council of God.

In the days of the apostle, the situation was still significantly different. At that time, Paul could look back on one and a half millennia of Israelite history. During this period Israel had been the exclusive carrier of divine truth. Whoever of all the people on earth wanted to know something certain about the God who made heaven and earth, whose throne is heaven and the earth the footstool of his feet, had to go to Jerusalem and learn from the scribes and elders of Israel. And whoever from among the nations, whether the most educated or the crudest, wished to come into personal relations with the living God and offer Him a pleasing sacrifice, he had to be circumcised and become a Jew. It is true that Israel had not understood the gracious thoughts of God for itself and for its salvation, nor had it become in truth a light of the Gentiles. Notwithstanding this, the divine promise of a Messiah was fulfilled, as he had been the object of the hope and longing of the faithful among the people for centuries. When the time was fulfilled, the Anointed One of God, the Son of Abraham, the Son and Heir of David, came. And indeed, in complete conformity with all that was said of him, he came "into his own," sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But - his own did not receive him. Israel, through its leaders, rejected the Lord of glory. In doing so, of course, it only took another fatal step on the path of hostility to God and rebellion, which the fathers had entered from the beginning and never thoroughly left. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, the Holy Spirit came after the entrance of the Messiah, rejected by his own people, as their representative, and that to Jerusalem, as it was promised. So the rejection of the Lord Jesus by his own people had nevertheless not changed anything in the great election thought of God. The departing Lord's commands to his disciples had been: "not to depart from Jerusalem", and, "to go up to Jerusalem". And at Jerusalem the "promise of the Father" was fulfilled. Thus, until then, the central position of Jerusalem and Israel in the matter of the Kingdom of God on earth was not only not questioned, but explicitly preserved and confirmed.

But now the high council of the Jewish people went one step further. If the young congregation, made up entirely of law-abiding and devout Israelites, had initially found favor with all the people, bitter persecution soon arose, and again, as with Jesus, on the part of the rulers and scribes. The same spiritual court that had condemned Jesus to death murdered Stephen, the man full of spirit and faith. With his stoning, the high council had also brusquely rejected the second gracious offer of the Lord in the sending of the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem. Now people and city, rulers and priests, temple and altar were ready for the righteous judgment of wrath. And it did not fail. The temple building was still standing when Paul wrote this letter. But he knew that the catastrophe was near. Israel was judged, it had condemned itself. This was the historical context in which the question came to his mind: Has God rejected his people? Proof and testimony enough that for the apostle, unlike for many in Christianity today, the last word in this matter had not yet been spoken. And today, after more than eighteen centuries since the writing of this letter, the Jewish question cannot be put more precisely nor more aptly than it is in the words of the great Apostle to the Gentiles here. He has formulated it not only for his time, but for all time. Thus also here the scripture bears the unmistakable imprint of its divine origin and character on its forehead.

A personal answer to a factual question

V. 1.2 Far be it from me, for I too am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he recognized beforehand.

The apostle's language leaves nothing to be desired in terms of clarity and decisiveness. He does not place us in the fog of mere conjecture, but in the bright light of unmistakable certainty. But we can be struck by the reference to his own person and relationship to the people of Israel for the justification of his so decisive answer. It is clear from his words that he wants to create solid ground for all further illumination of the mighty subject with a single resounding proof. His "for I too am an Israelite" is considered by him and should be considered by us as absolutely decisive. Other arguments follow in the course of the chapter, but none is of such fundamental importance for the apostle. This poses the question, what is the justification of the apostle, according to the scriptures, to use his personal position in this matter in such a prominent way as the first and supreme argument.

From the historical context it becomes clear that Paul was involved in a very special way in the events that gave him reason to ask: "Has God rejected his people? "The evangelical reports do not mention his name anywhere. But it is undoubted that Paul was a contemporary of Jesus, that he knew him personally (2 Cor. 5:16) and that he sat at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem during the public ministry of the Lord. Thus, he certainly had repeated opportunities to comment on the person and the claims of the Nazarene with his religious comrades, the Pharisees, as well as with his professional comrades, the scribes. Which kind this had been, is probably subject to no doubt. The brightest light on the relations of Saul of Tarsus to Jesus of Nazareth falls from the history of that first Christian blood witness, who was put to death by the high council. We pointed out above that in the condemnation of Stephen the Jewish spiritual high authority had only consistently proceeded on the once trodden path of hatred of Christ and the rejection of God's counsel of grace with the Jewish people. The apostolic sermon immediately after Pentecost was unmistakably a repeated offer to the Jewish nation as such of repentance, forgiveness and subsequent restoration of the kingdom of Israel under the Messiah returning from heaven. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, which was ordained for you beforehand, whom indeed heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, of which God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. "If Israel as a people and its rulers had repented with them, their Messiah could have returned and the kingdom of Israel could have been restored immediately according to the prophecies of the prophets.

But things turned out quite differently. "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," the Master had told the disciples. So it happened. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, full of grace and power, not an apostle, but a spirit-anointed representative of the congregation of devout Israelites who had found their life in Christ, was brought before the high council, which shortly before had condemned God's anointed to death. It is most significant to observe how these two councils differed from each other. At that time Jesus had appeared before his judges without any visible sign of supernatural majesty or power, only as a simple man, exalted in his lowliness. Our painters deceive us when they depict him with a glow around his head. He had no form nor beauty (Is. 53, 2). There was no badge of divine majesty and glory. It was different with Stephen. All who sat in the synod looked at him and saw his face like the face of an angel Acts 6:15. And those elders and scribes were versed enough in the Scriptures to be immediately reminded of the shining face of Moses, whose disciples they prided themselves on being. Jesus would have had the ability to speak powerfully and convincingly before his accusers and judges. For thus, according to the testimony of the executioners who were to catch him, no man had ever spoken like this man. But the scripture had to be fulfilled: He did not open his mouth like the lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep

that is dumb before its shearer Isa. 53, 7. But to Stephen, according to the promise of the Lord (Mt. 10, 19. 20), the Holy Spirit filled his mouth in this hour so with powerful and shocking speech that it pierced their hearts and they gritted their teeth over him. When Jesus simply declared that he was the Son of God, the high priest not only found time to tear his robe theatrically, but the man who was formally condemned to death was brought before the Roman governor in accordance with the law of the land, and the governor was given to understand that he was absolutely loyal to the established order, in short, the due forms of public jurisdiction were still observed. But when Stephen cried out, "Behold, I see heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! - then all loyalty and the last remnant of decorum was completely at an end; they shouted loudly, covered their ears, rushed at him with one accord, pushed him out of the city and stoned him without further ado.

Here comes the man who, in the wonderful and mysterious guidance of God, is called to give us the answer through the Spirit to the question: "Has God rejected His people? "The witnesses, who according to the law (Deut. 13:9; 17:7) had to cast the first stones at Stephen, laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Of him it is said that he consented to be killed. He appears from now on as the very soul of the persecution that fell upon the disciples on the part of the Jewish supreme authority. With consuming zeal he rages against the Nazarenes, drags men and women into prison and helps to pronounce the death sentence. Snorting threats and murder, he is not content to purge Jerusalem and Judea of this blasphemous sect. He solicits and receives letters and authority from the chief priests to extend his persecution beyond the borders of the Jewish land to Damascus in Syria. It is unmistakable that the Acts of the Apostles presents us in the person of this Saul of Tarsus the embodiment of the whole dogged, fanatical hatred of the Jews against the Lord and his young church. Like no other, Paul is therefore able to join in the discussion when it is necessary to let us look into the horrible depths of religious hatred and Pharisaic blindness. Like no other, he is called to speak when it is a matter of determining the full extent of Israel's guilt in the now soon to be executed judgment of national hardening and rejection. Saul of Tarsus is the most perfect personal expression of what lies at the root of the whole question of whether God has rejected his people and gives it its sharpness. It cannot be denied, this man is an expert of the first rank in this field.

But it cannot be enough for us to determine to what extent Paul was competent to testify out of his own experience about the burning seriousness of the Jewish question; we must also recognize what now entitles the former persecutor of the congregation to lead us, on the basis of his own experience, from the darkest depths to the brightest heights of divine thoughts of love and grace with this very people of Israel. Because that he with his bold and decided: I am also an Israelite! has nothing less in view than this. It will now be a question, then, of ascertaining from Scripture how Paul's conversion has the same character of national representation and embodiment of God's great redemptive thought with the people of Israel. For this the Word of God through Paul himself offers us the hand in an ample manner.

In 1 Tim 1:16 he writes to his son Timothy: "But for this reason mercy was shown to me, so that in me, the first, Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering as an example to those who will believe in him for eternal life. "These words want to give us information about the divine intention underlying Paul's conversion. It had a special meaning. Its scope reaches far beyond the limits of the personal life that is directly affected. Paul himself expressly ascribes to himself the character and significance of a "first" or "firstfruits". Now it is not to be thought that the apostle thereby simply wanted to ignore the fact, well known to him as a persecutor of the congregation, that long before him tens of thousands from Israel had come to the living and beatific faith in Christ and into the possession of eternal life. To believe the inspired apostle to be so dishonest, self-conceited and deluded is surely not acceptable. We have to look for another interpretation for his designation "a first". This is close to his further words: "as an example for those who will believe in him for eternal life". It is not

possible to apply these words without further ado to the generality of those who are led to faith at all in this age by the preaching of Christ. For it would be quite out of harmony with the facts as nineteen centuries have put them before us. The conversion of the apostle has by no means been a model for any number of conversions, however small, that have taken place since those days and are still taking place today. His words do not point at all to the present time of salvation, but to one still to come. The word "a first" is to be understood in an exemplary way, - that much is clear. Paul's conversion is thus singled out from the generality of other conversions, - it wants and must be seen in a special light. In his conversion, God has, so to speak, provided the model (for this is how the word "hypotyposis" used by Paul here can very well be transferred) for the future national conversion of the people of his choice. Now it is not immodesty or arrogance when the apostle points so emphatically to his conversion as fundamentally evidential of God's purposes of grace with Israel as a people. Such a procedure is quite consistent with all we know of his manner of prophesying beforehand. Prophesying is done not only by words, but also by examples, by visual instruction, which is brought to illustration in persons. We point to the history of Joseph, Moses, David, Jonah, Ezekiel and many other men of God, whose personal experiences are typical of various traits and moments in Israel's national history.

It is also in full harmony with this that the story of the conversion of this one Jew Saul is told to us no less than three times with great detail in the Acts of the Apostles. Why does the Holy Spirit place such emphasis on this very conversion of the Jews? If what we have just learned from 1 Tim. 1:16 is correct, then it is obvious why this model of the demonstration of God's long-suffering had to stand out three times as a typical sermon of hope, i.e. in divine fullness, especially on the increasingly dark background of Israel's national unbelief, as it confronts us so shockingly in the book of Acts.

The peculiar character of Paul's conversion is further revealed by the fact that, unlike all the others reported to us, it is not due to the preaching of the Word by apostle or deacon, but is brought about by the personal appearance of the transfigured Christ from heaven. To the authorized representative of the high council, who embodies in himself all the deluded enmity of his people against the Messiah, the Lord himself reveals himself in his infinite longsuffering, love, and mercy, and the murderous persecutor becomes a hero and apostle of faith, a chosen armor to bear the name of the Crucified and Risen One before kings and nations and before the sons of Israel. This is, as Paul writes through the Spirit to his son Timothy, the pattern and example according to which God in his time will deal in equal love and favor with the people, of which this very Saul was the embodiment and first fruits in both directions. Thus the apostolic "for I too am an Israelite" gains a far-reaching, prophetic-typical meaning. It becomes a bright mirror from which a reflection of God's great plans of redemption with Israel shines towards us, the fanatical, blinded Pharisee people, whom he, however, did not reject despite everything.

Zechariah 12:10-14 has already seen it not differently when he says: "And they will look upon me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn over him like the mourning over the only begotten. As with Saul, it will be this sight of the once rejected one that causes such national repentance and lamentation. In the same sense Jesus had already spoken with unmistakable reference to Zechariah in the streets of Jerusalem shortly before his entrance: You will not see me from now on until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Mt. 23, 39. He also sets his reappearance among his now still unbelieving people in Jerusalem as simultaneous with their final, believing recognition of his Messiahship. In the consideration of the 26th verse we will still have the opportunity to come back to the question of the connection between the personal appearance of Jesus Christ among His people Israel "the other time" and their national conversion. But if God, as is evident, has made of Saul, who was so wonderfully brought to Jesus' feet, the greatest missionary, the most powerful and successful preacher of the Gospel of all times, then we get an inkling from this example and pattern of the greatness of the mission still reserved for the people of Israel among

the nations of the earth, when they too will one day have their "day of Damascus" at the appearance of the transfigured Christ from heaven.

Perhaps it is also appropriate to take the word from 1 Cor. 15:8, where he speaks of appearances of the Risen Lord and refers to the last one as the one that became his "untimely birth". It cannot be dismissed without further ado that the apostle also here, with the gaze of his loving heart directed toward his people, speaks of himself as one "born before" his people.

So the addition here is probably also: "from the family Benjamin" is not without meaning. It is rather obvious to see in it an allusion to the critical history of this very tribe, which was once on the verge of being completely eradicated and disappearing from the people of Israel. 20, 21. It is as if the apostle wanted to imply that he belonged to a tribe whose continued existence as a people was also once very much in question. But just as at that time a single tribe was not allowed to perish, so now it is even less to be thought of that God has condemned his whole people to perish.

"God has not cast away his people whom he knew beforehand. "It is not within the scope of this writing to enter into the discussion of this profound mystery which is revealed to us in these words. How the fact of divine foreknowledge, indeed of divine predestination, can be united with the moral freedom of man in all his actions, will probably remain a problem for us until we "know even as we are known." But there can be no doubt in the mind of the simple believer in Scripture as to the simple fact that God was conscious from the beginning of all His works, and thus also of His selection of a people to be the bearers of His great thoughts of salvation and kingdom with the rest of mankind. Rather, it is one of the basic prerequisites of all true, unshakable trust in God that we are dealing with a God who for all eternity will never be thwarted by men, angels or devils, nor will he be able to frustrate any of his plans. Thus it is inconceivable that God should have erred or miscalculated in the choice of his people. Whoever thinks that Israel turned out to be completely different from what the Lord had in mind only needs to read carefully in the prophetic writings of this very people of Israel. There it is recorded in almost striking detail how this people will constantly refuse to respond to God's thoughts, how it will stubbornly trample His goodness and love under its feet, how it will even reject God's anointed and consider itself unworthy of eternal life. Thus, not only foreseen, but clearly foretold was Israel's attitude towards its own Messiah and Lord at His first appearance in the flesh on earth. As Peter also testifies in Acts 3:18: "But God has fulfilled what he announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer.

It is obvious that neither here nor there the scripture would have thought to take away the least of the horrible indebtedness of the people of Israel by such explanations. The sinfulness and damnability of the national unbelief of just the chosen people nowhere suffers a restriction or diminution. But as far as the divine side of Israel's election is concerned, the thought of a failure or a thwarting of the divine plans and counsels is likewise quite remote. Nowhere is there even a hint that the Lord was prompted by Israel's conduct to make a radical change in his original thoughts and counsels. That Israel's national election was irretrievably over because of Israel's sin and guilt is a human fancy, without all justification by the word of divine revelation. Rather, it is clearly stated here: Whatever Israel's fault - for I am also an Israelite, a first, a persecutor of the church - that God was surprised, disappointed or prompted by this to carry out his original thoughts of love with his people as such is simply excluded.

What God has set out to do
And was he wants to have,
This must also finally come
To its purpose and goal.

The meaning of the remnant after the election of grace

V. 2-6 Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the story of Elijah? How he appears before God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets, torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life. But what does the divine answer tell him? I have left me seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So now also in the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. But if by grace, then no longer by works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.

The apostle now brings an example from Israel's national history for the further consolidation of his position that Israel's national rejection is not to be understood as final. The spirit introduces him to a period of the kingdom of Israel (of the ten tribes), which had renounced the house of David and the national sanctuary right from the beginning, which therefore already represented the principle apostasy from the original intention of God with his people. Thus, the chosen period itself is one of the darkest and most desperate that that apostate kingdom is going through. It is the tragic moment when that mighty witness of God, the prophet Elijah, comes before the Lord with the shattering and only too well-founded accusation against his own people: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and dug up your altars. Three years and six months of closed heavens and arid time had been fruitless to the hardened race and its idolatrous royal couple. The divine answer by fire from heaven on Mount Carmel and the horrible judgment on the idolatrous apes, which the prophet himself was allowed to execute, found their echo in the murderous message of Jezebel: "The gods do this and that to me, if I do not do to your soul tomorrow at this time, as one of these souls. " What was there to hope for? - I am left alone, and they are after my life. - It is enough, so now, Lord, take my soul; I am no better than my fathers.

Truly, the national ruin seemed so irretrievable, the damage so desperately wicked, that the prophet no longer sees a ray of hope in the face of the holiness of a God unduly despised and reviled.

But what does the divine answer tell him? I have left me seven thousand men who have not bowed their knees to Baal. This can only mean, compared to the accusation of the prophet and the conclusion drawn by him of the hopeless national ruin: Elijah, the total ruin of my people is not to be thought of even under the most desperate circumstances. Where the eye of the zealous prophet could behold nothing but inexorable ruin, God in His own hidden way had seen to it that a "holy seed," a "remnant by choice of grace was preserved. Seven thousand who had not bowed their knees before Baal. Seven thousand in whom Jehovah, unaware of the prophet, had wrought such grace. Seven thousand, in whom he found the means to save Israel's peculiarity as Jehovah's people, in spite of the general destruction, as a guarantee of a new time of hope for the nation.

So now also in the present time, says the apostle, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. The application which Paul makes from that history to the present, most critical case in the matter of the national continuance of Israel, is quite obvious and simple. The historical parallel completely excludes by itself any thought of those who are not of Jewish nationality, that is, of Christians from the Gentiles. The apostate, idolatrous mass of the people of the days of Ahab and Jezebel corresponds to the nation of the present day, which in incomprehensible blindness rejected the Anointed of God, delivered Him into the hands of the Gentiles to be put to death, and in presumptuous defiance continually refused Him who spoke to them through the Son and through the Spirit. By the remnant according to the election of grace, only those can be understood who from Israel, thus as members of the unbelieving people, corresponding to those seven thousand, no longer agreed with the condemnation judgment on the Holy One of God, but who in faith in the Crucified One condemned themselves and thus allowed themselves to be saved from their sins and were subject to the righteousness of God. These believing Israelites were, of course, just as small a minority as those seven thousand in comparison with the great mass of the disobedient people.

But the apostle does not leave us in doubt about the importance of this holy seed for the proving of the divine love intention with the whole, though apostate people. He sees in the small crowd of Israelites believing in Christ of his (and our) day, i.e. of this present time of salvation, during which Israel as a people languishes under heavy divine judgment of blindness and hardening, the divine guarantee for the unbreakable continuance of the original thought of God with the people of his choice. These remnant are today the "Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16.

This is a point of view from which the great historical Christianity of the nations has only too rarely looked at the believers from the circumcision. Almost universally, one has not only completely reconciled oneself to the decline of the original, apostolic Jewish Christianity, i.e. to the cessation of special Jewish-Christian congregations, but one has also almost completely refrained from any preservation of their Jewish national character in custom and way of life in the missionary and evangelistic efforts to Israel. Even where the Gentile Christians did not work openly and purposefully for the de-Jewification of these remnant by choice of grace, it was generally taken for granted that an Israelite would simply cease to be a Jew through faith in Christ and the acceptance of Christian baptism. While Paul never says of himself: "I was an Israelite", but always only: "I am an Israelite", - one hears in Christianity and in Jewish missionary circles nothing more frequently, if one speaks of believers from the circumcision, than: N. N. used to be an Israelite, or a "former" Jew! Here is an obvious contrast between the Christian and the Pauline conception of the relationship of the believers from Israel to their people. If one sees in them, as Paul always does, the actual holy seed, the divine guarantee for the lasting existence of the Jewish nation as such, then one would neither use such a language of former Jews, nor agree without any misgivings to the de-Judaization in custom and way of life of these actual carriers and preservers of the Jewish people's hope, appointed by God for this purpose. Nor, of course, if one had remained in the apostles' doctrine and practice, could the opinion ever have taken root in Christendom that Jewish conversions and the conversion of Jews to Christianity were to be striven for, but that there could and should be no question of national preservation or restoration. Rather, as Paul undoubtedly does, one would have seen in every convert from Israel a new and continuing proof of the unbreakability of God's faithfulness to the people of his choice. For the conversion of the Jews to Christ and national hope for Israel as a people are not mutually alien or even mutually exclusive concepts, but rather they demand each other. It cannot be proved historically that in the course of this whole time of salvation since Israel's national fall, despite the theoretical and practical unbelief of Christianity, there has never been a complete lack of believers from the circumcision. But one is certainly entitled to assume with great moral certainty that the eternally faithful God will not have denied Himself even in this point. The number of such faithful Israelites, circumcised in the flesh and in the heart, (Ezk. 44, 7. 9; Rom. 2, 28.29) may have been only a very small one at that time. However, this golden thread was certainly never completely interrupted during these dark centuries of Israelite history.

With the designation "remnant according to the election of grace" the apostle falls back on his detailed exposition of this divine fundamental law given in chapter 9, as it is expressed in the clearest way precisely in Israel's election and separation, and as it can never be properly grasped and understood without this divine illustration in Israel's history and leadership. Observance of God's ways with Israel is indispensable to a correct and profitable knowledge of the divine counsels. It is neither coincidence nor arbitrariness that Israel's history occupies such a large space in the whole of the biblical revelatory documents. Therefore, all theology and philosophy, which wants to grasp and fathom the great God-thoughts of election and foreknowledge "in itself" and thereby refrains from Israel and God's ways with it in judgment and grace, must lose itself in monstrosities or shallowness.

Already above in v.2 the apostle touched this basic truth, that Israel's national continuance is self-evident only because God has foreknown it as his people. In the further course of this chapter he expresses the same truth again and in an even stronger way when he speaks v. 29: God's gifts and calling cannot repent him.

A detailed discussion of this truth of revelation is far from the purpose of this writing. Nor would we be able to fathom its depths. We are content to be pointed to it here and submit to it in simple faith. Our inability to grasp the mystery of divine election has neither the power nor the right to disturb or even rob our minds and hearts of rest, with which we comfort ourselves that the Lord has been aware of all his works with Israel from the beginning and that all his ways, even the darkest paths of judgment, are paths of grace and peace.

For it is a choice of grace, as it is written. In the divine ways of election, divine grace seeks and finds the appropriate means of its expression and realization. That is why Paul emphasizes emphatically: "If it is by grace, then not by merit of works, otherwise grace would not be grace. This should make it clear, especially to us believers from the Gentiles, that our gaze must never remain fixed on the examination of the character of Israel, for example concerning its worthiness, piety or willingness. We must let our apostle tell us very clearly: By grace you have been saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast. But here, as the same Paul explains, nothing else is valid. It is by grace, i.e. by the eternal, inexhaustible reason of the free, divine mercy of love, that a remnant believes and is saved, despite and in spite of their people's national blindness. This remnant does not consist of more pious, better or nobler Jews, who would be more worthy to attain such a lot. It only proves that God's mercy boasts against judgment. And so it is also by grace that God gives this peculiar but significant expression to His eternal thoughts of love with Israel as His people. This remnant by grace is the sure pledge that God's great counsel with all His people rests on no other ground than the ground of grace. So also the prophets have already seen and proclaimed it. Thus Isaiah (in 1, 9): If Jehovah of hosts had not left us a little remnant, we would be like Sodom, we would resemble Gomorrah. And (4, 3) whoever is left in Zion and whoever is left in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who is written down for life in Jerusalem. And Ezk. 36, 22.32: Thus says the Lord: I do it not for your sake that you may know it, house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name. And before him Isaiah was allowed to say to his people (54, 8. 10) I have hid my face from you a little in the moment of wrath; but with everlasting mercy I will have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer . . . For the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall fall: but my mercy shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace fall away, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

Israel's national blindness, a judgment of God

V. 7-10 What then? What Israel seeks it has not obtained; but the choice it has obtained, but the rest have been hardened, as it is written, God has given them a spirit of sleeplessness, eyes not to see, ears not to hear, to this day. And David says, Let their table be to them a snare, and a snare, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence. Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and let their backs be bent at all times!

Paul now goes on to establish the present state of affairs with regard to the Jewish nation. This proves to be threefold: 1. Israel as a people has missed its actual calling through its own fault; 2. only a selection from Israel grasps it correctly and realizes it; 3. the remaining mass of the people falls into the shocking judgment of hardening.

1 The word: What Israel seeks, it has not attained, - is unmistakably connected to ch. 9, 31, where the apostle testifies to his brethren according to the flesh: "Israel sought after the law of righteousness and did not attain the law of righteousness. "Thus, according to the Scriptures, Israel recognized its true calling to be God's people among the nations and strove to fulfill it in its own way, but in doing so it fell into completely wrong ways and missed it completely. Why? Because it thought that the law of righteousness consisted in legal righteousness, a delusion that still holds it, and with it a large part of Christianity, under its spell. Israel had already failed to recognize the significance of

the great deed of God through Moses, to which it owed its national existence. The redemption from Egypt, from the house of service, was not through the law, but without the law, by free saving grace alone. Only to the redeemed people the law is given from Sinai. In its election, calling and salvation as God's firstborn people among the nations, the law had not the least part. Israel did not recognize this. And with it it has delivered the fact proof that the possession of the most distinctive "religious consciousness", which nobody can deny to the Jewish people, is no guarantee against the most very alarming aberration and God-hostile falsehood in religious matters. The most pious nation in the world has been driven into the most disastrous paths, an object lesson from which Christianity could have learned something.

2. but the election obtained it, - namely the law of God's righteousness, and that through faith in Him who justifies the ungodly. Here again, the election refers to the small group of believers from the circumcision, the true Israelites, according to Rom. 2, 29, the Israel of God of Gal. 6, 16. It is exegetically inappropriate to think of believers from the nations, although what is said here certainly also applies to them. What this selection has attained through faith makes it the actual "Israel of God". In them, although only in a very narrow framework, the original and unchanging thought of God finds its expression and representation with Israel. They are true sons of Abraham and thus heirs of the promise. They carry the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith, just as their father Abraham received it from the Lord only after he became a partaker of the righteousness of faith - not before Rom. 4, 11. As it is also said of Christ that he became a servant of circumcision for the sake of God's truth, to confirm the promises of the fathers Rom. 15, 8.

So now this selection, these believers from the circumcision, is that part of the body of Christ which, like the head and his apostles, stands in a special relationship to the people of the selection and which, as the Israel of God, vouches for the realization of the divine council of love with the people at large. Therefore, also for them the apostolic word remains in force: "If anyone has been called circumcised, let him not draw a foreskin; if anyone has been called in the foreskin, let him not be circumcised. . . Let each one remain in the profession in which he was called." 1 Cor. 7:18, 20. As irreconcilable as the hostility of our apostle is against the delusion of the Judaization of the believers from the Gentiles through circumcision, the thought of a Judaization of the believers from circumcision through the abandonment of it is also far from him. If the covenant sign prescribed by God for the natural descendants of Abraham as a national characteristic is removed, then the power and significance of the profession in which they were called, namely to testify to their people in a special way to God's unbreakable faithfulness to Israel, also ceases.

For just as Abraham was only qualified as a believer and justified to become a "Jew", i.e. a circumcised one, so this selection of grace only enters through faith into the right witness relationship with those who are not "true Jews", because they are only outwardly so, circumcised with the hand on the flesh. That these believers, who have become true Israelites, do not have to get rid of their national Jewishness and its sign of circumcision, should be self-evident and has never been understood differently. For faith does not abolish the importance of circumcision for the Jew any more than it did for Abraham. Rather, it teaches him to understand and appreciate its true value and promise for his people.

The rest have been hardened. After an unbreakable law of God, the persistent refusal to obey the truth is followed by the inability to recognize it, i.e. the hardening or blindness. Thus, again, in the same people who boast of the law and who strive for their own righteousness in the law, the law of God has found its justification with terrible irony.

How difficult it must have been for the apostle to write down such a poignant judgment about his own people, we may judge from his confessions. He writes in Rom. 9, 3: I have desired to be removed from Christ by a curse for my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh. And ch. 10, 1: Brothers! The good pleasure of my heart and my pleading for them to God is for salvation. But the

fervor of his love for his brothers does not prevent him from fully and firmly facing the serious, terrible truth: The remnant have been hardened. The Holy Spirit in no way permits this Jewish apostle to find fault with, or to find fault in the least with, the tremendous sharpness and severity of this judgment of God upon his beloved people. A delicious proof for us that we are not dealing with the word of men here, but with the true word of God. Only God's spirit is able to keep the soul calm and the eye clear in the face of such eerie depths. Only God's Spirit can produce such holy impartiality in a Jew's heart which, out of ardent love for his people, wished to be removed from Christ by a curse. Here it becomes gloriously evident that in these remarks we have before us not subjective impressions and feelings of a weak, passionate man, not the own mental product of only a deep, religious thinker, but the real, holy and infallible word of the true God.

Nor does it appear otherwise to the apostle himself, because he says: "As it is written. "And again: "David speaks. "This again clearly states that Israel's judgment of hardening was by no means unforeseen, unexpected or even accidental. Also in this only the scripture is fulfilled, as little as this again wants to rhyme with some of our conceptions. It becomes obvious that Israel did not show itself differently, did not take a different path, did not bring a different result than the Lord had previously let the people's own prophets see and proclaim. There can be no question, therefore, in this terribly serious matter, remotely of God having been mistaken in Israel, and of Israel's persistent refusal to enter into God's thoughts with her having resulted in a thwarting or partial thwarting of the divine purposes. To whom the prophetic writings of the OT still have divine authority, he simply cannot help but acknowledge that Israel actually fulfilled the preaching of its own prophets in its historical statement of the gospel of God in Christ. Thus again, precisely by its stubborn refusal to obediently submit to the Word of God made flesh, it has corroborated the unbreakable truthfulness of Him who spoke to it. Israel, by its unbelief and rejection of salvation, put the strongest stamp of authenticity on the Messiahship of the Nazarene it rejected. Only the one spurned by his own people can be the true Messiah according to the Scriptures. Israel seeks to justify itself and becomes obdurate; but in doing so it justifies God. Now in this whole chapter we are only dealing with the question: Has God, after all that Israel has done and transgressed, rejected his people? Let that be far away! Israel's hardening, horrible and shocking as it is, does not at all mean its final rejection. Rather, it is clearly shown to be a foreseen and ordained link in the chain of divine miraculous ways with this people of his choice.

From Israel's Fall of the Nations Salvation

V. 11: I say now, Have they stumbled, that they should fall? Far be it from them! But through their fall salvation has become to the nations, to provoke them to jealousy.

The apostle has just made us look into the eerie abysses and depths of God's judgment, which took place on the people of the election according to the Scriptures. This fact is not to be shaken. It is just as far from him to conceal it as to gloss over it. But does no ray of divine light fall into this oppressive darkness, no heart-relieving, redeeming glimmer of hope? Paul immediately leads us out of these deep darknesses into a magnificent, light-filled panorama of divine ways of wisdom. And as the target object of the same we see nations - ourselves.

I say now, have they stumbled that they should fall? In other words, does Israel's hardening lie before us as the purposeful conclusion of God's ways with the people of His choice? Have we, and has God, arrived at the final chapter of Israel's history? Does the nation, blinded and fallen, fulfill God's intentions towards it, so that it stands for all times as a shattering warning sign, on which only holy wrath and terribly serious judgment can be read? Or does not mercy also boast here against judgment? Indeed. And in a way that challenges us Gentile Christians to adoring and astonished love and gratitude. For "through their fall salvation has come to the nations. " This is a key to

understanding the mysterious workings of God with the chosen people. This is the brilliant vindication at the same time of the inexorable judging severity with which God reveals His firstborn Son among the nations. A reflection again of the incomparable, eternal act of love, which does not spare the only begotten Son, but gives him up for all of us. One more hint for us to recognize how close Israel and the only begotten are to each other in God's thoughts.

Now we Christians from the nations are certainly not in a position to master or even doubt this account of the apostle. All the great Pauline literature of the NT bears witness to how justified is the declaration that salvation befell the nations through Israel's fall. From the prophetic writings of the OT it is clear that in the counsel of God, as it is laid down there, a blessing and redemption of the nations is indeed taken into certain prospect, but always only through a previously redeemed and blessed Israel as the firstborn among the nations. Thus Ps. 67:2, 3; 87; 96; 102:14-23; 117; Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10; 12:1-4; 25:6-8; 60:3; Jer. 3:17; 16:19; Zech. 2:10, 11; 8:20-23. All these and many other prophetic pictures of a pardoned and redeemed world of nations on earth have as their prerequisite without exception a previously pardoned and saved Israel, which now imparts salvation to the nations in accordance with its original disposition and calling. This was also unmistakably the quite justified and biblically well-founded view of the apostles and first believers from Israel, from which then flowed the for them supposedly self-evident but erroneous opinion that for the believers from the nations the way to God's kingdom and God's salvation leads only through the gate of circumcision. For this reason, Peter did not need a simple reference to certain statements of Scripture concerning the entrance of the nations into the kingdom of God, but a new, additional revelation from heaven was needed to move him to enter Cornelius with the gospel before his own people, Israel, as a people, had taken hold of salvation. It is an alarming misunderstanding of the true situation if one wants to put Peter's refusal without further ado on the account of Jewish narrow-mindedness. Peter could not answer differently according to the scriptural revelation valid until then. The whole OT contained and still contains no instruction or directive to approach the nations with the gospel of God before Israel had become a part of it. Therefore Peter, when he is questioned by his brothers, the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem about his approach to Cornelius, does not refer to any word of God of the Old Testament, as he infallibly should and would have done if there had been such a word to justify his procedure, but only to the special instruction he received through the vision in Joppa. But it is not our God's way to help with visions where there is already an abundance of clear scriptural instructions.

In complete agreement with this, our apostle Paul also repeatedly refers to very special revelation, "not done in ages past," "kept hidden" in God, which became special to him, concerning his special mission to the nations and their relationship to the Body of Christ. Read: Rom. 16, 25. 26; Eph. 3, 4-9; Col. 1, 26.27. So while the entire prophetic word of the OT unanimously derives salvation of the nations from the conversion and salvation of Israel, Paul introduces to us a thoroughly new thought of God, completely hidden from the prophets of Israel: "Out of Israel's fall salvation for the nations! " Do these two thoughts cancel each other out? Not at all! Is the new one a mere substitute for the old one? Not that either. We shall soon hear it clearly from the mouth of our very apostle that there is no thought of a cancellation or annulment of that plan of God for the world of nations revealed to the prophets by a blessed or blessing Israel. The whole program of God developed and set forth in the Old Testament rightly remains untouched. For all that God has spoken through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old must be fulfilled. It is a vain labor of love if one tries to suggest all kinds of ways out and detours to the dear God, be it that one spiritualizes everything at all what the OT prophesies great, or that one falls for the little bundle of a so-called spiritual Israel in order to avert the supposedly threatening bankruptcy of prophecy. Our God is not in any embarrassment, from which we would have to tear him out with our artificial interpretations. Everything that is written remains calm, and in the end there will be no lack of a word of all that the mouth of the Lord has spoken. God can wait. The eternities are his. Thus he has understood to fill now already almost two

millenniums with the execution of this older, earlier, great thought, hidden from the Israelitish prophets: "From Israel's fall to the Gentiles salvation. "Truly, a wonderful God! How inexhaustible his sources of help, his thoughts of salvation!

We can well imagine how difficult it must have been for the believers of the circumcision, who stood as Israelites on the messianic ground of salvation (Rom. 3:1-4; 9:3-5), to believe in a temporary abrogation of the biblically founded principle: "salvation through Israel's conversion and restoration of the nations" and to submit to this new, Pauline: "salvation from Israel's fall to the nations" without further ado. Yet the same phenomenon recurs in Christianity today. History repeats itself, because people remain people. The principle is emphatically asserted for Israel today: Extra ecclesiam nulla salus! (Outside the church no salvation!) The only way of participation in salvation for Israel leads through the - church!

But how much light falls on the whole apostolic age from a due, unprejudiced consideration of these two seemingly (but only seemingly) contradictory, but in truth splendidly complementary basic features of divine activity with Israel. How natural and harmonious it seems that those who became believers from circumcision faithfully stood up for the holy, good and perfect law, without thereby forgiving the least of the righteousness of faith. And how self-evidently and magnificently simple for all believers from the nations the Pauline principle: if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ is of no use to you. If the retention of circumcision among those was a testimony of faith in God's faithfulness in His promises given to national though blinded Israel, the same act for the believers from the Gentiles was a direct denial of the wonderful ground of revelation on which they stood: "out of Israel's fall to the Gentiles salvation. " How much foolish talking and writing about the irreconcilable conflict between Paul on the one hand, and Peter and James on the other, could have been spared in theology if it had been held in all simplicity that there was full scriptural correctness both with one direction and with the other. Those were wrong who wanted to prevent Paul from establishing the obedience of faith among all nations by bypassing Israel. Are not those equally mistaken who today, at the turn of the ages, oppose a national establishment and restoration of Israel, because this would be tantamount to circumventing the Church?

But how far from God's heart the thought of a final rejection of Israel lies, is again shown by the phrase: "To provoke the Jews to jealousy. " According to this, God himself has for this time of salvation, in which the sentence applies, "out of Israel's fall the Gentiles' salvation" - yet still beside it thoughts of peace and salvation with the fallen people of choice. For the expression "provoke to jealousy" is explained to us by the apostle in v. 14 to the effect that salvation is the object.

To speak in human terms, God had good reason to expect that His chosen and so highly favored people Israel would not look askance at the unforeseen but therefore all the more glorious manifestations of unmerited grace and mercy against the Gentiles. Until then they had been strangers and distant, outside the citizenship of God's people, without God and without hope in the world Eph. 2, 12. Israel should have sought and praised this incomprehensible grace of its God all the more humbly and thankfully. But there was and is no less reason to expect that the world of the nations, so wonderfully blessed beyond all expectation, should accept the fallen and blinded people of Israel with such love and gratitude that it would be almost impossible for them to close their minds any longer to such expressions of ardent love on the part of the believers from the Gentiles. Thus we are confronted with the serious question of how the Christianity of the nations, so graciously afflicted by God through Israel's fall, has related to Israel. If the experiences and destinies of Israel among the Christianized peoples of Europe must serve as an answer to this question - and they certainly will - then we are confronted with a devastating accusation of these very Christian peoples. For by far the majority of the chapters of Israel's history among these peoples are written in blood and tears squeezed out of them through the centuries by those, and often even in the name of the Crucified. If the modern anti-Semitism of Christendom seeks to justify itself by referring to Jewish

impudence, consciencelessness and godlessness, it may well be asked who has borne the greatest responsibility for the actual development and shaping of the Jewish national character for centuries. Was it not our Christian ancestors? Who created the laws under which this people was allowed to live, to change and to shape itself? Not they themselves, but the "Christian" authorities, into whose hand the God of Israel gave his own people to be educated and chastised. Can the sons be surprised that their teeth become dull after the fathers have eaten herbs for centuries, or are the misdeeds of the fathers not visited on the children in Christianized peoples? Is it not true in the history of Christian nations that what a man sows, he must also reap? If the people, of whom the divine counsel was and is that in them the peoples of the earth should be blessed, has today in many cases become like a maggot in the body of the Christianized cultured peoples, - what conclusion may be drawn from this for the moral and spiritual condition of these peoples. Maggots do not grow in a healthy body. We need not close our eyes to Israel's terrible indebtedness. It is precisely in the treatment meted out to it by the nations that a severe but just judgment is carried out. For it was they who utterly resisted the counsel and will of God to send light and salvation to the Gentiles. They refused the apostles to shine through the night of pagan darkness with the Gospel of God. Thus they certainly reap what their fathers sowed, and God is justified again. But, where is our glory, to whom mercy has come?

Israel knows very well about our faith. It knows our catechism very well. It is not unfamiliar with our dogmatics. It also knows about our hope. We have often enough reproached it, and with good reason, that our hope is a living one, overcoming death and the grave. But what does Israel know about the love of God that is in Christ Jesus? Is it not the greatest of these three? Where are the overwhelming, heart-wrenching demonstrations of the love of the nations that boast of the gospel of the love of Christ, where have they happened to poor, hounded, restlessly driven Israel?

This much is confirmed by the history of the centuries that lie behind us, that a real emulation in the matter of salvation and the knowledge of God in Christ among the Jewish people dwelling among the Christian nations only occurred in isolated cases and to a very limited extent. It is equally undeniable that Israel is neither the only nor the greater culprit in this failure to carry out the thought of God clearly expressed by Paul here. The blame lies undoubtedly where the brighter light, the richer knowledge was - with Christianity. The image of Christ, however, as it was to confront Israel from the life and conduct of the peoples surrounding her according to the word of the Lord, was and has been for the most part a very dark and unclear one, a sadly distorted one, even in many cases a devilishly distorted one. It is, of course, very convenient and easy to say to oneself and to others, oh, the Jews have opportunity enough to hear the Gospel, if only they would. But with this we will still not be able to silence the terrible accusation that they must raise against a love-less Christianity, which has shown the Jew everything about Christianity, - except the greatest, love.

How much more their full number!

V. 12: But if their fall is the wealth of the world, and their loss the wealth of the nations, how much more their fullness!

The apostle is talking about the wealth of the world and the nations, which was created by Israel's fall and loss. What kind of wealth is meant by this cannot be subject to any doubt. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans reveals to us in a shocking and truthful way how terribly low the world of nations had sunk, how complete its moral bankruptcy with all its proud, splendid cultural life. If there did not come new, rebirthing, saving and sustaining life forces among the peoples, then the dissolution of all order, the disintegration of the whole human body, its transition into moral rottenness, into decay and putrefaction was inevitable. It would have been Israel's gloriously great task to be this salt of the earth and light of the nations that sat in darkness. They refused to do so. They

pushed away the prince of life, the light of the world. They loved the darkness more than the light. Hence their fall and diminishment. For only in a small fraction, a selection, a remnant, did God come into his own. These entered into God's thoughts of salvation with themselves and the world of nations. That is why the Lord also used them as instruments. Also for the new age and the new order of things, it is men of Israel, members of the elect people, who are entrusted with what God has spoken. Even the great apostle to the Gentiles is not himself of the Gentiles, but belongs to this election of grace. The rest are given over to hardening. And the people, who were promised an increase in number and growth - like the sands of the sea and the stars of heaven - have been given over to continued diminution. Israel has not been able to exercise its national missionary calling to the world of nations until today. It has retreated, its Torah in its arms, into the sulking corner of the synagogue and has always looked on with resentment as these Nazarenes, whom it pushed out of its midst and banished, have filled the whole world with the gospel of Christ. It has watched idly as altars of idols have sunk into the dust before the name of Jesus of Nazareth. It kissed its Torah and kept it for itself. May the Gentiles sit in the darkest shadow of death, Israel considered it beneath its dignity to show them even its moonlight!

But this did not thwart God's salvation thoughts with the world of nations. For now, according to God's sovereign decree, the gospel passed over Israel's fall and Jerusalem's ruins directly to the nations. All the exuberant riches of God's grace and knowledge in Christ were brought among the nations unabridged and without the slightest reservation. One has only to read carefully letters like those addressed to the Ephesians and Colossians and to realize that such manifestations of divine wisdom, mercy, love and glory do not go out to the people of choice, but directly to strangers and distant ones, to those who have not the least claim on the basis of any promises or covenant relations, and one is overwhelmed by the breadth and length, depth and height of such teachings of God.

To what extent the nations, to whom such a revelation of God has happened, have made it their own, how deeply they have penetrated into the full content of the glorious gospel of the grace of God, that is of course a question in itself. To this day, the painful lament of the prophet is in place: "Lord, who will believe our preaching? And to whom will the arm of the Lord be revealed? Is. 53, 1. Nevertheless, it remains a blessed, delicious fact that among the peoples to whom the gospel has come so far, the Spirit of the Lord has sought and found, called and chosen such through the Word, who are "God's people" under this new order and whom the glorified Head in heaven uses and will use as His body, even if they are not recognized as such by the great world, which is not worthy of them. But they were always and are still today the greatest wealth of the world. It owes to their presence, without acknowledging it, everything that is present and effective in it in the way of preserving, uplifting and saving life forces.

That a large, probably even the largest part of today's name Christianity is only "stupid salt" and that such a mere fashion and habitual Christianity is trodden under the feet of the people, should not surprise us. The Master has not said otherwise before. Nevertheless, it will be a terrible realization for the faithless, God-hostile world, when the judgment will one day begin at the house of God, when the first separation and sifting of future days will take place on this very ground, and the true, spirit-begotten living church of Jesus Christ, whose life was hidden with him in God, will one day be taken away from this world and will meet its transfigured Lord and Head on clouds in the air like Enoch 1. Thess. 4, 17. When their loss has become irretrievable, the irreplaceability will be felt heavily and bitterly. For then the torrent of destruction, held back until now by her salting presence, will sweep away everything without limit, foaming wildly.

Then, in such a crisis and catastrophe, will God's counsel of love with the world of nations be exhausted and come to a complete conclusion? Just as little as it was the case with Israel, when it refused to hear and receive the one who came to it in grace and truth. For Paul continues here, "How much more their fullness! "According to the whole inner and outer context, these words can

mean nothing else than "how much more riches will come to the world and the nations from Israel's fullness," if Israel's loss and fall already meant such riches for the world of nations. Israel's full number, however, stands in a very definite contrast to the small selection of grace which alone is available in this time of salvation for the realization of the divine thoughts of love. The full number, however, cannot possibly be used in the same period of divine stewardship, which is characterized by the fact that the people of Israel, according to its full number, languishes under condemnation and must wait until God works out salvation from their fall of the Gentiles, according to His hidden work. These apostolic words about Israel's full number certainly want to point us to an age in which God's thoughts with Israel will unfold again according to a completely different standard than it can be in the time when God only uses a "remnant" from Israel.

Or is this just a mirage, a deceptive fantasy that Paul conjures up before his own eyes and ours? There is a way to read and interpret the Scriptures in such a way, since one allows oneself, where the things of God seem to be too great, to simply make deductions from their statements, which one then puts on account of the oriental imagination or the exuberant natural mood of the respective writer. But if such a procedure is allowed in Rom. 11, then why not also e.g. Rom. 8, for instance in the 1st verse: "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? "Is this also only a Pauline mood, a mere outpouring of subjective emotion and not to be taken seriously? Where then is the rocky foundation of our hope? No, and a thousand times no! Let the word stand! We do not want to condemn anyone who thinks that here, where it is "only" about the Jews, he may allow himself a deduction from the overwhelming greatness of this idea of God. He must settle this once with the one who has spoken to us through the mouth of his holy prophets and apostles. But let no one prevent us from submitting ourselves fully to the word in the obedience of faith: "How much more their fullness. "We cannot and will not believe that this is only a tentative expression of the apostle's too bold hope. Rather, we are firmly confident that the same Spirit who did not allow Paul, as we saw above in v. 7, to pass by the horrible condemnation of his people with gentle silence, now also places before the soul of the same Paul a real, true, prophetic thought of God. What Paul expresses here in the form of a rhetorical question is without question valid for us as a real, essential, divine intention of salvation with Israel. We have not the slightest doubt about its future great fulfillment through the "full number", even if it may elude our present recognition and even our imagination to grasp it in fixed lines and historical forms. We are aware that our knowledge and prophecy are piecemeal. Let us not forget how little the first Christians were able to grasp the whole magnificence of the thoughts of their covenant God with us pagan "dogs". However, this did not prevent our God from carrying them out to their full extent. From their fall came the wealth of the Gentiles. Now then, how much more will arise when the "full number" and not only a "remnant" grasps the great thoughts of God and passes them on. Paul truly means no more, but also no less.

With you heathens I talk

V. 13. 14: For I say to you, the nations: Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the nations, I honor my ministry, whether in any wise I may provoke them that are my flesh to jealousy, and deliver some out of them.

One would think that with such clarity of the address, a confusion of the addressees would be impossible. Nevertheless, there are still readers and interpreters of this epistle today who insist that there is no mention of natural Israel anywhere in this eleventh chapter. Everything refers to the so-called spiritual Israel, the New Testament church. The clear, unambiguous way in which Paul distinguishes here between "you, the nations," and "those who are my flesh," speaking of these but to those, has neither value nor meaning for such. To every unprejudiced reader the emphasis with which Paul here, interrupting his argument as it were, addresses himself especially to the nations, must already bring home the thought that he is here concerned with complete clarification of the

mutual relations in the great divine plan of the ages. If there were ever a language that did not know how to distinguish in tense and pronoun between the one who is spoken to and the one who is spoken of, then it would simply be unsuitable as a means of communication. But the words of the scripture certainly do not suffer from this basic pillar here. With complete sharpness and definiteness the part addressed - the nations - stands out here from the part - "which are my flesh", i.e. Israel - of which the statement is made. It is also inadmissible to think of spiritual relatives, i.e. of fellow believers, when referring to "my flesh". Such a play of arbitrariness with the words used by the Holy Spirit puts an end to all fruitful understanding of the Scriptures. If this designation does not mean the natural Israel, then it is in vain to look around for words at all, which should still mean something.

It is embarrassing to have to have such an argument. But of the future necessity of such an argument the apostle seems to have had a prophetic foreboding. Otherwise we could hardly explain the awkwardness with which in these two verses he meets any misunderstanding about the right addressees as well as about the right object of his remarks. That Paul was not mistaken in his fear of a confusion of terms is proven by the comments on his letter.

What Paul intends in this address is certainly nothing other than what he writes to the Ephesians: "Remember that you, once the nations in the flesh, who are called foreskin from the so-called circumcision, which is done in the flesh with hands, were at that time without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. "Eph. 2, 11-13. The glorification of his ministry as an apostle to the nations happens most effectively by reminding us how dark and hopeless is the natural ground of the people on which we stand, and how from this lightless ground stands out with exuberant clarity the majesty and glory of God's heavenly calling that has become ours in Christ Jesus. In view of the overwhelming thoughts and counsels of God with Israel revealed to us by our apostle, we should remain mindful of the rock from which we are hewn and the well of the grave from which we are dug. The prophets of Israel followed the same pedagogical rule with their people. (Cf. Ezk. 16, 3-5; Deut. 26, 5) This was the fatal delusion of Israel, which boasted, we are Abraham's seed, we cannot lack. Christianity is also not free of such delusion. Only with us it is still much more wrong. For for natural Israel there were and are certain divine promises which are unbreakable. For the rest of us nations there is no such thing. The privileges of all members of the nations to whom salvation in Christ has come in this time are indescribably great. There has never been anything higher and greater for Israel. Also the poorest, most miserable, most sinking and most depraved among the nations is invited without any restriction to all that God offers in Christ Jesus through the gospel. But all this only as long as and because the gospel is preached for a testimony among the nations. Mere belonging to any of the peoples reached and influenced by the gospel does not remotely imply any legal claim to the kingdom of God or eternal life, although both are offered in the gospel. Nevertheless, countless thousands are under the delusion that they, as born Christians, i.e. as descendants of Christian ancestors, have quite similar hereditary claims to the promises of God as Israel. The apostle wants to counter this delusion in a sobering way and to make us, the nations, clearly aware of the fact that we are by no means standing on covenant ground, but, if we are in Christ Jesus, only on ground of grace. With Israel the matter is different in so far as certain national promises are guaranteed to them in an unconditional form, which cannot be revoked even by their unbelief. These include, for example, continued existence as a nation and possession of the promised land as long as the earth stands. In view of this fact, the idea, which is often deeply rooted among us Gentile Christians, as if we Christian nations could never be lacking and our national survival could never be in question, is a questionable, quite unfounded delusion. On purely national ground, our legitimate and national claims are simply zero compared to those given to Israel as a people. Only as many as are in Christ are co-heirs, co-fellows and co-partakers of the divine promises.

In v. 14, the apostle's motive is clear even in these omissions. It is to provoke them to jealousy and to save some from them. This corresponds completely to the divine thought revealed in v. 11. Paul, through obedience of faith, knows himself to be one with the God who called and ordained him to be an apostle to the Gentiles; not only in that he conveys the whole wonderful counsel of grace to the Gentiles unabridged, but also in that he lets his attention also be directed to the salvation of some of those who were of his flesh. And under the concept of salvation we may well include everything that is offered in the gospel of God's grace in this time of salvation to all who want to believe in Christ, to the Jews first and also to the Greeks - sonship and fellowship, right of inheritance and glory with Christ Jesus.

Here it becomes obvious that Paul by no means indulged in lofty thoughts and hopes of a conversion of his entire people through the preaching of the gospel. A proof of his sobriety, his clear insight into the divine plan of the ages. He was clearly aware that a national judgment of blindness rightly existed for this time, and that at the same time a national conversion and rebirth was therefore unthinkable. Before Paul was appointed apostle to the nations, before Israel had become ripe for judgment, when the word was still proclaimed in Jerusalem by the Twelve to the Jews alone, it was an open question - the possibility was still there - that Israel would have entered into the thoughts of God through national repentance and acceptance of salvation and would thus have made the establishment of the Messianic kingdom possible. This possibility was now cut off. Israel as a people is pushed by God to the siding and put out of action until the mystery of the body of Christ will be completed. But in the meantime, the appointed servant of God to the nations can and should always keep his eyes on stirring up Israel to jealousy and saving some of them. If only the apostolic practice had always been maintained in Christianity.

Likewise, in wide circles one could still learn a lot from the apostle in sober observance of the planned, divine order of the ages. How much confusion and lack of clarity there is in this area in evangelical Christianity among the most zealous missionary friends and workers. Why does one not say to oneself in all soberness that the same age, the same economy of salvation, cannot possibly serve the preparation of a body rescued from a world hostile to God, the congregation of Christ, which is liberated from the existing authority of darkness, but whose maturity and completion has as its prerequisite the continued existence of the world's hostility and the kingdom of darkness, can never at the same time serve the conversion of this very world hostile to God and the destruction and removal of the authority of darkness. One has so much historical sense otherwise. Why don't we learn more from the history of the past centuries? In them, even under the most favorable conditions imaginable, whole bodies of people, not even whole cities or smaller communities as such, have never come under the obedience of faith. The most powerful sermon has always led only some, never all, to grasp salvation in Christ. The matter seems quite simple to us. If it was the divine plan from the beginning to convert the world through the gospel in this age, to do away with the dominion of darkness and to establish the kingdom of the Anointed One on earth, then this plan was just as decisive for the first, tenth, fifteenth century of this era as for the nineteenth or twentieth. Or should it be one of the great achievements of our discovery-rich time to have also discovered that God's spirit in all earlier centuries had been either completely haphazard or thoroughly unsuccessful in carrying out the great divine program for this time of salvation? One need only say this to show the inconsistency and untenability of such an assumption. A good portion of high opinion of oneself and of the generation of our days is involved, where with great zeal and tremendous enthusiasm one issues the slogan to conquer the whole world for Christ and to lay it at his feet. This sounds wonderfully courageous and enterprising. But it lacks the first prerequisite for God-pleasing work, the agreement with the divine plan and goal. We have not a word to say against all serious, sober and biblically based efforts to bring home to the Christianity of our day the full magnitude of its responsibility toward the Gentile world still languishing in darkness. We do not at all consider it a utopia that the wealthy, well-equipped and open-door church of our days should really bring the

Gospel as a testimony to all the peoples of the earth. We only caution ourselves and would like to warn against unhealthy goal-setting, since world conversion or world conquest is used as a leitmotif. This can only mislead and must be followed by painful disappointment and reaction.

Israel's Acceptance - Life from the Dead

V. 15: For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will the acceptance be but life from the dead?

In a threefold turn the apostle has to show us what Israel's fall had to mean for the world. Verse 11: Through her fall salvation to the nations. V. 12: Their fall, their diminution of the world's riches. And now: Their rejection of the world reconciliation.

Of course, this word, like the earlier ones, is to be understood only from the point of view of the divine offer to the world of nations; not from that of the actual appropriation on the part of the same. Unfortunately, to this day the latter has neither seized the salvation brought so close to it by Israel's fall, nor has it taken possession of the wealth freely given to it. Thus she persists in her hostility to God and closes her ear to all messages of reconciliation that have continued through the centuries. How the world of nations, which adorns itself with the name "Christian", can expect to fare better on the day of judgment than Israel did at the beginning of this age, is again almost incomprehensible. And at the same time, the great majority of Christians still consider themselves called to judge with a wise face the "incomprehensible blindness of the Jews" in their midst and, of course, consider themselves to be seeing.

Now Paul again confronts us with an astonishing contrast: If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what is the acceptance but life from the dead? If there can be no honest doubt as to whose rejection is spoken of in the first clause of this sentence, there can be just as little doubt as to whose acceptance is taken into definite view in the second clause. To think of a different subject for the assumption than for the transgression would simply be exegetical sleight of hand.

In addition, the thought expressed here is such a great and surprising one that we must look for explanatory and confirming statements in the Scriptures. When Paul explained in v. 11 how salvation had come to the nations from Israel's fall, we had to realize that this was a completely new point of view, not revealed in previous times. Here it is different. We will see how the apostle gives us here, through the Spirit, in this one word "life from the dead," as it were, the quintessence of all God's great thoughts with Israel. A detailed examination of the ways of God with this miracle people shows in an irrefutable way the existence and the faithful execution of such a basic law, according to which Israel's whole history and origin took place and according to which also its future will be shaped on the basis of the firm prophetic word.

First, let us consider Israel's natural origin and its emergence as a people. This is derived from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Right at the birth of Isaac we meet the present basic idea: life from the dead. The impatient agreement of the faithful Abram with the Egyptian maid Hagar, at Sarai's own suggestion and anticipating God, resulted in the birth of Ishmael, of whom the angel told his mother: "He will be a wild man; his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him. But his father thought highly of him and believed that in him he really had the promised heir. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. Now follows a thirteen-year silence and waiting of God against Abram, while his Ishmael grew up to be a scoffer. But even now, when the Lord significantly and prophetically changes his and his wife's name and establishes with him the covenant of circumcision, Abraham comes before the Lord and says, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you! And the word of the Lord came, saying, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac; for with him will I establish my everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him Genesis 17:19. The key to the correct understanding of this incident and of the divine fundamental law

expressed in it is given to us in two places in the New Testament. First Paul writes about it Rom. 4, 19: And Abraham, not weak in faith, did not look at his already dead body, because he was almost a hundred years old, and the death of the womb of Sarah. Here the main emphasis is on the firm, unconditional faith of Abraham. But it is just as clearly the speech of the condition subject to the whole divine procedure, the first-death of both parents of the heir of the promise. It is unmistakable that God let Abraham and Sarah wait so long only so that it could be said that both bodies had died, and thus it would be irrefutable that Isaac's birth meant nothing else than life from the dead, and at the same time God's "laughter" in the face of all human hopelessness. The same is confirmed by Hebr. 11, 12: Therefore also of one, and that is dead, were born as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the sand upon the shore of the sea innumerable. Our justification to give this meaning to the birth of Isaac is complete by these two scriptural words.

Further strong confirmation of this view is provided by the later life of Isaac. Isaac himself must also become a "living one from the dead". This happens through his sacrifice. In the same on the one hand the faith of Abraham reaches its summit. At the same time, however, we are face to face with the greatest Old Testament example of the greatest deed of God, the offering of the only begotten, the heir of the promises of the fathers. Here, too, we have solid scriptural ground under our feet. For three days Isaac is already as good as sacrificed, like a dead man, for his sorely tried but proven father. In his heart the beloved is given up - as good as slaughtered. Even the hand does not fail the man of faith. It already pulls out the deadly knife, then God himself puts a stop to it. And what is the secret of such a death-defying, death-conquering faith? Hebr. 11, 9: He judged that God is also able to raise from the dead, from where he also received him in the parable.

There it is clearly stated, it was the hope in the God who could make alive from the dead, which inspired Abraham at the sacrifice of Isaac. A wonderful, clear image of the firm eternal resolution in the heart of the eternal Father not to leave his Son in Hades, but to raise him from the dead on the third day. What else could God have intended than to illustrate this fundamental truth quite tangibly and vividly to the father of all believers, because all world-conquering and victorious faith can rest on no other ground than the resurrection ground: life from the dead. As it is written: If Christ has not been raised, our preaching and your faith are in vain, 1 Cor. 15:14.

Thus it is most definitely confirmed in word and deed that this Isaac, the second in the line of the great progenitors of the people of Israel, was the exemplary embodiment of the great idea of God with the people of His choice, namely life from the dead.

Perhaps we will be answered here immediately that in Isaac certainly messianic and spiritual, but nevertheless less Israelite-national exemplariness is shown to advantage. We therefore turn to the more distant history of the natural descendants of Jacob, the son of Isaac, and investigate whether in the formation and leadership of the nation descended from them the same principle - life from the dead - was also expressed in an unambiguous manner. And we do not find it otherwise. This is unmistakably the stamp which the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stamped on the natural Israel of the twelve tribes right from the beginning. For what was the meaning of the birth of the Israelite nation according to the Scriptures?

The sons of Jacob had grown into a large nation in Egypt after the death of Joseph, so that the Egyptians were afraid of them. But the more they were oppressed, the more they spread. Anti-Semitic oppression weighed terribly on them. Then God sent them a savior and prince, a model of what was to come. With great patience the same God bore the vessel of wrath, Pharaoh, who thought he could mock the God of the Hebrews. But at last the threatened, horrible judgment of wrath came upon the Egyptian firstborn. In one terrible night the angel of the Lord strangled all the firstborn in all Egypt, from the first son of Pharaoh sitting on his throne to the first son of the prisoner in the jail and all the firstborn of the cattle. There was not a house without a dead person in it, and

there was a great cry in all Egypt, the like of which had never been nor would be Ex 11:4-6; 12:29, 30.

And in the huts of the wretched Hebrew slaves? Then the word of the LORD was gloriously fulfilled: Among all the children of Israel not a dog shall murmur, among men and cattle, that ye may know how the LORD divideth Egypt from Israel. All the firstborn of Egypt frozen in death. Israel's firstborn all alive. Was this not life again from the dead?

Let us investigate further and ask how it happened that Israel's firstborn did not fall equally to the avenging sword of the strangler angel. There we come again on the trace of the same principle which is authoritative for all salvation work of God in mankind. At Moses' command, a few hours before that midnight, so terrible for Egypt, every family in all Israel had slaughtered the feckless male lamb of one year old, and every Jewish householder had faithfully painted of its blood with the clump of hyssop on the doorstep and doorposts. Thus it was written on every hut in Israel: we seek cover, salvation and life only in the blood of the innocent, strangled lamb. So for all the firstborn of Israel, life arose from the death of the Lamb. Thus, Israel stands before us as God's firstborn among the nations with the distinct imprint that was placed upon it at its birth as a nation: Life from the dead.

If one wants to object here again that this has its correctness with the firstborn, but nevertheless cannot be attributed without further ado to the whole people, then we continue our research. And we find that the same principle is applied to the whole people in a grand style. The whole of Israel, men, women, children, cattle, and a great company, go out of Egypt, out of the house of service, to the last claw, all in virtue of the one sacrificial lamb slain by themselves. Thus also this whole multitude is led as on eagle's wings with infinite patience under loud proofs of divine grace and mercy through the desert to Sinai. This was the delicious bridal time in the relationship of God with the people of His choice - they were not under law, but under grace. Thus they had come from Succoth to Ethan, in front of the desert, when a strange command from Jehovah to Moses happened, to steer around with the whole army toward the Red Sea and encamp there. To mere reason this was incomprehensible, fatal folly. It gave the Egyptians reason to think that the desert had now enclosed their former slaves, that they were infallibly given back into their hands. This was precisely what God had intended, who wanted to bring glory to Pharaoh and all his power. Israel, who then as little as today recognized his God's miraculous ways with them, cried out in despair to Jehovah when they saw the Egyptians behind them. But the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the children of Israel to go straight ahead into the Red Sea. That night God blew a strong wind that split the waters of the sea so that they were like walls on either side. So Israel went dry-footed through the depths of the sea. What was this but a great grave that opened up before them, into which the Lord made all his people descend, and he covered them with the cloud of his presence, only to let them come out alive from the dead on the other shore? This is at least the spiritual application that Paul makes of this event 1 Cor. 10, 1, where he interprets it symbolically as a baptism and burial. There can be no doubt for a simple-minded believer in the Bible that the Lord also had other ways and means at his disposal to save his people from the hands of the Egyptians that night. But the way in which God does something always has its meaning. Nowhere does coincidence prevail. Thus, if it had pleased the Lord in this way, the Israelites could have walked confidently and safely above the mirror of the Red Sea at his command. Jesus did so in his time, and Peter did likewise at his word. But God chose, not without intention, just this peculiar method of salvation, by which it was made clear to His people and to us in the most demonstrative way that it was a matter of death and resurrection truth. So now we see clearly how all Israel, in the same way as its firstborn, received the distinguishing stamp: Life from the dead. For the next morning the shore of the Red Sea lay full of the corpses of the Egyptians, while God's people were allowed to sing on the heights of exemplary resurrection.

We follow the fortunes of this people a little further and come to the time when Aaron's priesthood is challenged, but then miraculously confirmed by the Lord Himself. We find two kinds of priesthood

in the Word of God. A heavenly, higher, imperishable one, the priesthood of Melchizedek, i.e. of the Messiah and his heavenly congregation. Besides this there is an earthly, lower and changeable one, the priesthood of the house of Aaron, i.e. the priesthood of the firstborn on earth. For it is the clear idea of Scripture that the tribe of Levi was entrusted with the priesthood in place of all the firstborn sons of Israel from the twelve tribes. (Cf. Genesis 3:12, 13, 41). Now it happened that objections arose among the people themselves against this divine procedure. It was said that the whole congregation, all of them, are holy, and Jehovah is in their midst Deut. 16:3. The divine decision was first made by a shattering, terribly serious judgment. Fire devoured the transgressors, and the rebellious band of Dathan and Abiram, together with their wives and children, went down alive into Sheol, and the earth covered them. They perished from the midst of the assembly. So also in this matter the decision was made according to divine procedure, as we have already recognized it as effective several times.

More clearly, however, the principle of "life from the dead" comes to light when Jehovah, after judging, commands that Moses demand staffs from all the princes of the children of Israel according to their fathers' houses, one staff for each father's house, twelve staffs, and that the name of each tribe be written on its staff, the name of Aaron on Levi's staff. Thus described, Moses then laid the twelve staffs in the tabernacle of the Testimony before Jehovah. And when he went into the tent the next day, behold, the rod of Aaron, which was as dry and as dead in the evening as all the others, had manifested life. It had sprouted, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds in a single night. A glorious sample of what the Almighty, the God of Israel, is able to accomplish on a dead, barren stick when it counts. Once again, this was unmistakably clear: life from the dead.

Now Aaron's priesthood stands for that of all the firstborn sons of Israel. Israel is God's firstborn son among the nations. The priesthood belongs to the firstborn. Until this day, however, this people of his priesthood has not yet been able to wait among the nations. So here again the divine miracle with Aaron's withered staff is the prophetic reference to the time when Israel, as made alive from the dead, will take root, bud, blossom and fill the circle of the earth with fruits, when it will finally wait for its priestly office for the blessing of the peoples of the earth Is. 27, 6; 37, 31.

But this is not the end of the series of prophetic silhouettes in which the basic feature of the divine miracle-working is expressed. There is still Jonah, the prophet of God against his will. Even in Israel the realization has partly broken through that in the son of Amittai an image of his people is to be seen, how it refuses the mission to the nations intended for it by God, in order to testify then nevertheless finally as one judged by the Lord the name of the living God to the Gentiles. Now the application which the Lord Jesus makes of this strange experience of Jonah leaves no doubt that a piece of resurrection truth is also laid down in this story. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. " Mt. 12, 40. Indeed, Jonah also prayed from the belly of the fish thus: . . . "I cried out from the bosom of Sheol; Thou heardest my voice. . . the bars of the earth were behind me forever. Then you brought up my life from the pit, Jehovah my God. "Jonah 2:3, 7: And when the fish had spued the prophet again unto the land, the word of the Lord came again unto him that was restored from the dead. And when he went as one risen from the dead and preached repentance to Nineveh, all Nineveh turned from its wickedness to the Lord, and they repented in sackcloth and ashes, from their greatest to their least.

If the exemplary significance of Jonah for his people Israel is correct, which we do not doubt, then we have here again in great prophetic outlines the seemingly hopeless rejection of the people on the one hand, but on the other hand also their resurrection from the dead and the great, overwhelming effect of his preaching to the nations, when they will dispose of their missionary task for the second time at the word of the Lord.

Finally and in summary we refer to the vision of the withered bones of the whole house of Israel Ezk. 37, 4-12. The explanation coming from the mouth of the Lord Himself: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel", saves us the trouble to look for an appropriate explanation of this vision anywhere else. In any case, this completely clears up all attempts to read into it, for example, the dead Gentile nations or the dead Christianity. By this we do not want to be understood at all, as if we consider a practical application of this face to the heathens or the scanty name Christianity as inappropriate. But application is not interpretation. The two must be well distinguished. And as far as the correct interpretation is concerned, the Lord's own commentary is decisive.

We now ask: Can one think of a picture under which the condition of the whole people of Israel, which is quite hopeless for all human thinking and imagining, could be represented more clearly and aptly than it is done here with the withered, splintered bones? And again, can it be more grandly and powerfully expressed that God's eventual purposes of love with the whole house of Israel are those of bringing to execution and display in them on a grand scale, on a national scale, that unique, divine principle of salvation, life from the dead, than is said in the words: Ye withered bones, hear the word of Jehovah! Thus says the Lord Jehovah to these bones, Behold, I bring breath into you, that you may live again. And I will put sinews over you, and flesh will grow over you, and I will cover you with skin, and I will put breath in you, that you may live. And you will know that I am Jehovah when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves.

From what has been said so far, various conclusions can be drawn. It is unmistakable that that divine principle has been expressed in manifold ways. It is like a great theme with delicious variations. When it was about the birth of Isaac, life from the dead meant the emergence of life from the dead natural being of his parents. When then Isaac was given back to his father as one who had come to life from the dead, it was the native who had fallen into death according to divine advice who was shadowed in Isaac. When later in Egypt Israel's firstborn received and represented life from the dead, it was the innocent sacrificial lamb, strangled by their fathers themselves, from whose death life blossomed for them. Thus this principle - life from the dead - already in its exemplary representation experienced a very versatile application. Certainly, if now in the assumption of Israel there is to be the great real historical realization and execution of this principle, we may expect that these various sides of so rich a thought of God will all find their outlet and their exhaustive fulfillment. It will be life from the dead, primarily in view of the naturally given historical ground. Israel's acceptance will amount to a supernatural generation of life by God in the womb of a hopelessly moribund world of nations. Again, Israel itself, like those withered bones, will come up from its graves and experience a magnificent resurrection from its own state of death as a people. Finally, however, as in the case of Jonah, a hitherto unattained, magnificent life activity will go out from the resurrected Israel over the world of nations. There is also a deep meaning in the strange fact that the prophets of Israel often speak of the Servant of Jehovah in such a way that it is not only exegetically permissible, but indispensable to recognize in him not only the Messiah, but also the people of Israel. It is not too much to say that Israel has a Messianic vocation among the nations. Again and again the Messiah identifies himself with his people. So far now only in the one son of Abraham from the family of David has been fulfilled what is decided in the principle "life from the dead". As fruit of this one resurrection we have before us a people of God of a new order, a church of firstborn sons of God. This means that God, in the execution of His great theme, has not only come as far as Isaac, but has also already come to the salvation and representation of a congregation of firstborns. Now only the execution on the Israelite soil remains, and from there on the soil of the great world of nations. After all, what is said in Hosea (6:2) will be fulfilled: He will revive us after two days and raise us up on the third day. And this will be followed by what is sung in Ps. 67: God, be gracious to us (Israel) and bless us, let his face shine upon us, that on earth your way may be known, among all nations your salvation! The nations will praise themselves, O God; the peoples will all praise you. And Ps. 72, 11: All kings will fall down before him, all nations will serve him.

As the firstling, so the mass; as the root, so the branches

V. 16:
But if the firstling is holy, so is the mass; and if the root is holy, so is the branch.

All the firstfruits in Israel of men, cattle and fruits of the field were sacred to the Lord. By this ordinance, the first given to the people liberated from Egypt, Israel was to be constantly reminded of its own calling as God's firstborn among the nations. Thus it was intended what should be done with the various firstfruits. All the firstlings of oil, must and grain, of oxen, sheep and goats, i.e. of clean livestock, became food for the priests. The firstlings of men and unclean animals, on the other hand, had to be loosed Deut. 18:12-19. A special allusion of the apostle seems to lie in the words used here to the provision in Deut. 15:18-21: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When ye come into the land whither I will bring you, it shall be, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall lift up an heave offering unto Jehovah: as the firstling of your grist ye shall lift up a cake for a heave offering among your generations; as the heave offering of the threshingfloor, so shall ye lift it up. From the firstling of your meal you shall give a heave offering to Jehovah. A similar one is found in Deuteronomy 23:10-14: there it is ordained that of the firstfruits of the harvest in the land a sheaf should be brought to the priest, who was to weave it before Jehovah. Israel itself was not allowed to eat bread, roasted grains and garden grain until the day they offered these firstfruits as a sacrifice to God.

Of very special importance for the correct understanding of this apostolic word is the divine order of a special feast of the firstfruits, the so-called feast of weeks, as it should be kept as the second among the three great main feasts of Israel seven weeks, i.e. 50 days after the Passover. Exodus 23:15-17 says: "You shall count your days from the next day after the Sabbath, from the day you brought the sheaf of sheaves: it shall be seven full weeks. Unto the other day after the seventh sabbath ye shall number fifty days: and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto Jehovah. From your dwellings you shall bring loaves of woven bread, two of two tenths of fine flour they shall be; leavened they shall be baked as firstfruits to Jehovah. In this feast the truth, so highly significant to Israel, of the holiness of all firstfruits, and thus of its own holy profession, found a particularly consecrating expression. And when the apostle wrote the words before us for our consideration, the proper "day of Pentecost" had already appeared. The Holy Spirit, in exact observance of the divine order of time given over it, i.e., not earlier and not later than until the day of Pentecost was fulfilled - had made His appearance in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast to Jehovah Himself. He took, in faithful fulfillment of the prophecy carried and permeated by himself in word and example, out of the gathered dough mass of the Jewish people who had come to the feast, the firstfruits, the loaves, and waved them before the Lord as an expectation and pledge for what Paul boldly concludes through the same spirit: If the firstfruits are holy, so is the mass.

We Christians from the nations are only too inclined to easily overlook the significance of that Pentecostal fulfillment in Jerusalem with regard to Israel's national central position in the Kingdom of God on earth. It is so obvious to us to see in it only the birthday of the church, into which we have also been incorporated. While first of all Pentecost has a thoroughly Jewish-national character. Let us not forget that it was the same Jerusalem which only a few weeks ago was reverberating with the insane cry: "Crucify! Crucify!" only a few weeks ago, into which the Holy Spirit descends to continue on its part what the Son of God came into the world to do, namely, to fulfill all the Scriptures. Proof and testimony enough that Israel and Jerusalem, for the sake of the crucifixion of their Messiah, had lost nothing of the central position assigned to them in the word of prophecy for all God's revelation on earth. Israel's unbelief can never cancel God's faithfulness. Only in Jerusalem could Pentecost happen. And in Jerusalem it happened. Accordingly, it was also exclusively Jewish men, representatives of the people who even then lived scattered among the nations, who were "woven"

by the Holy Spirit as a promising firstfruits sheaf to the transfigured Lord, the King of Israel. Thus Pentecost has and retains first and foremost a high significance for the future of precisely the blinded Israel, which at that time had already rejected the Lord, and for its future firstfruits' calling among the peoples of the earth.

To the image of the firstling and the mass, the apostle adds a second, that of the root and the branches. The conclusion is the same in both cases. In both images, he is only concerned to illustrate in advance what he later expresses as a firm principle: God's gifts and calling cannot repent of him. In this second picture, even more than in the first, the recognition of the law of natural belonging is unmistakably expressed. In the first, the principle of representation (the firstfruits for the masses) is more prominent; in the second, that of organic unity and growing togetherness (root and branches).

It should not surprise us that the same apostle here takes into account the purely natural-growth affiliation, who elsewhere emphasizes in the most decisive way: not all who are of Israel, these are Israel. Also not because they are Abraham's seed, all are children Rom. 9, 6.7. We do not move here in chapter 11 on the ground of the church, the heirs of the heavenly promises and goods in Christ Jesus, but we are definitely on the ground of the question of the continuity of the earthly nationality of the people of Israel. It is a basic law of all salvation-economic order that different, often contradictory principles prevail in different times of salvation. Thus, before the flood, the same God most strictly forbids the avenging of the bloody murder that Cain commits. After the flood, God clearly commands: Whoever sheds the blood of man, his blood shall be shed by man. Likewise, the Old Testament church, Israel, was allowed to offer worship and sacrifice only at Jerusalem. The New Testament knows nothing of such local restriction of its cultus. These are not contradictions, but self-evident differences that are in the nature of things. Whoever does not take this into account when reading the Scriptures and does not "rightly divide the word of truth," i.e., takes into account the different times of salvation and different orders of salvation, only causes confusion. That the same consideration of purely natural descent from Abraham is not alien to the word of God in other connections is proven to us by statements of Jehovah such as we have concerning Ishmael. Genesis 21:13: In Isaac shall be called unto thee a seed. But I will also make the son of the handmaid a nation, because he is your seed. And the continued existence of the descendants of Ishmael as a nation provides us to this day with the factual evidence of how God meant it.

Israel as a people would only have had to remain in the relationship originally assigned to it by God in order to participate in salvation in Christ as a people. The fact that this did not happen resulted in a perverse, painful, punitive separation, which the apostle now discusses in more detail. The first picture of dough and mass did not offer him the opportunity to do justice to this separation, which had become historical, of a very considerable part of the nation (actually of the larger one). This second picture offers him the same in an extensive way. We also recognize in it again that we are not dealing with meaningless, purely rhetorical repetitions and heaping of words, but with different viewpoints of the same fundamental truth. Israel's national calling to a holy people of God on earth remains untouched.

Do not boast against the branches

V. 17. 18 But if some of the branches have been broken off, and you, who were a wild olive tree, have been grafted in among them and have become partakers of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you boast against them - you do not bear the root, but the root bears you.

With a sure prophetic eye, the apostle now turns to the expected objections of his Gentile Christian readers. The latter undoubtedly had the preponderance in the Roman church. They are therefore also correctly grasped and treated in this whole line of evidence as the representatives of the Gentile-Christian church form of this whole course of time. The actual attitude and position of the Gentile Christians toward Israel in this period is sketched and portrayed with surprising, almost photographic fidelity. This has provided, without well intending it, the factual evidence that Paul wrote this word by the spirit of prophecy. In anticipating the various objections which Gentile Christian sense and unbelief would raise against the divine procedure with the people of his choice, Paul was not in the least mistaken. His proof is not only appropriate to this day, but a sad necessity. The Christianity of the nations did not understand Rom. 11 nor did they take it to heart, but they confirmed it for their own judgment.

Paul first presents us with a series of facts, which he strings together with great clarity and sobriety, and from which he then draws the conclusion for us: Do not boast against the (broken) branches.

Some branches have been broken out.

After all, it had come to the extreme. Israel's stubborn disobedience left no other possible procedure than serious, severe judgment. God carried it out. But it was not calculated and aimed at a total rejection of the people. Some of the branches only, not all were affected by it. In those days, before the eyes of the world and the believers from the Gentiles, a flourishing, fruitful, strong Jewish-Christian community stood there as the living and loud-speaking witness of God's faithfulness to His people Israel. This believing part of the Jewish people (though the minority) justifies the apostle's "some of the branches." The Greek word for "some" expresses only an indefinite not necessarily small number.

You were a wild olive tree.

This is the second fact. The you of the apostle is undoubtedly not to be understood individually, i.e. from the relationship of the individual, but corporately or collectively in this whole line of evidence. The personal address is chosen for the sake of greater forcefulness. Unmistakably, however, the point of view in this whole passage is not that of personal behavior toward salvation, but that of the relationship of the great bodies of the people to the counsel and plan of God and to one another. Paul does not speak here of personal salvation or rejection at all. Before him stands Israel as a whole and the Christianity of the nations as a corresponding total body. The "you" is therefore not addressed to a real, but to an ideal personality. Like also in the legal life of the nations corporations are regarded and treated as judicial persons.

The designation "wild olive tree" explains itself from her here and in the following verses carried out contrast to the "noble" olive tree of divine planting, Israel. The same corresponds absolutely to the biblical representation of the essential difference between the people of the election and the remaining nations which God let go their own ways. There divine discipline and care from divine side; as it is written: What was yet to be done in my vineyard that I had not done? Is. 5,4. Here quite self-willed and as such unhindered natural development. As it is written: To no nation has he thus done like Israel Ps. 147, 20. Moreover, God himself had taken care that Israel should not mix with the nations, but strictly preserve its peculiarity. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it mentioned that God's thoughts with Israel as a people had suffered a change in this piece. Where, of course, as is common in Christianity today, no distinction is made between the external, hereditary people, state and national church on the one hand, and the congregation that is in Christ on the other, it is not surprising if the original, fundamental barriers and distances between Israel and the world of nations are easily ignored. This has prepared the ground for the appearance of a reform, assimilation and after-Jewism, which is one of the saddest and most chilling caricatures on the soil of the life of nations. No wonder then that in the same circles one can indulge in the delusion, and is virtually sold on it, that one stands by virtue of natural descent from generations of Christian ancestors in the direct

succession of divine promises of salvation and even national promises. (Cf. what is said above about v. 13 and 14).

Grafted and shared the root and fatness of the good olive tree.

In an exceedingly vivid way, these words present to us the completely new, surprising relationships that have now occurred on the ground of the New Testament proclamation of salvation among the nations. On top of this lies the great, glorious fact that it is really a matter of a thoroughly true-to-life and vital organic fellowship, an unabridged, full and complete entering into root and fatness, i.e. into the whole full content of all divine grace and love for those who are by nature wild olive trees. In addition, however, this explanation resists the thought of a purely Gentile-Christian development of the kingdom of God, detached from all organic relationship to Israel. We cannot examine here in detail to what extent the historical development of Christianity among the nations took place according to this principle. One does not find it very difficult to explain, nor to deplore, the early disappearance of actual Jewish Christian communities. We have already pointed out that for internal reasons we cannot but firmly believe that at no time during the whole course of this age has there ever been a lack of believing witnesses of the truth of God in Christ Jesus from and among Israel. Likewise, it is very obvious to us to believe that the Christianity of the nations would have been greatly blessed if real Jewish Christianity had continued to exist alongside it. It cannot be denied that in earlier centuries the degeneration and exaltation of the Church of the Nations, which had attained external power, played a considerable part in the retreat of actual Jewish-Christian congregations. Certainly, the Christians of the nations would never have misjudged their true relationship to Israel and Israel's relationship to the divine plan of the kingdom to such an extent if they had had a viable national Jewish congregation at their side as a living corrective. That the continued existence of specifically Jewish-Christian congregations during this age cannot be dismissed as a possibility is evident to us already from the fact that in the canon of the NT, in a number of writings addressed to Jewish-Christian readers, such a possibility is certainly taken into account. Nor can we doubt that it is in God's plan, even before this age reaches its conclusion, to see to it that the end returns to the beginning, i.e. that there will again be congregations which will read the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as the Petrine Epistles and those of James and Jude as their proper addressees. The reawakening of Jewish popular consciousness has already become a fact. The aspirations of the Zionists for recognition under international law and the restoration of a Jewish nation in the family of nations are not hopeless. As soon as these should be realized, the formation of a Jewish-national Christian synagogue or congregation is not only desirable but inevitable.

Do not boast against the branches

The fact that here among these branches only the "broken out" ones are to be thought of, who have fallen to the judgment, should need no special discussion. It is not meant the minority believing in Jesus, but the unbelieving and blinded mass of the Jewish people. Certainly, the few who have become believers from Israel should be all the more secured by this apostolic admonition against disdain or even cold contempt on the part of the Gentile Christians. But whoever looks around today at the state of Christianity in this area at the beginning of the twentieth century cannot help but notice (exceptions excepted) a very far-reaching disregard for this admonition. It is as Godet says in his commentary on this passage: "At all times we see Christians looking with the deepest contempt upon this people. . . There is always a certain ignominy attached to the name of the Jew, which does not entirely spare even the most respectable converts.

Here, too, history repeats itself, and the nations prove that the Scriptures are right when they say that there is no difference, that they are all sinners (Jews as well as Gentiles) and lack glory before God. In the days of the apostle, it was an unbridled, blind, Pharisaic pride that filled the nation of Israel to its own destruction against all gentiles or "goyim". Today Israel has to suffer the same ignominy from the bearers of the Christian name in the world of nations - it is a blind, fanatical

arrogance which was the godfather at the birth of anti-Semitism in Christian edition and which looks down with sovereign contempt on all that is called Jew. Whether Christianity will reap a more pleasing harvest from such sowing than Israel once did?

You do not carry the root, but the root carries you!

Organic relations to natural branches, i.e. to vital congregations of believing Jewish Christians, unfortunately no longer exist, because the latter have disappeared. The apostle does not speak of such here either and thus reveals his sure, prophetic view. But Christianity never gets beyond the organic dependence on the "root". The same exists and will remain in undiminished strength and scope. It is "communicative" of everything that God entrusted and sent only to Israel. As far as she believes, the whole fullness of God is closed to her, irrespective of her origin. But not to the nations, not even to a selection from the nations, is entrusted, for example, what God has spoken. Even the New Testament literature intended for the congregation, the second part of the Bible, is written by Israelites only. (The only possible, but not proven exception, was Luke, for he, though born a Gentile, had certainly been a proselyte of Judaism before he became a believer in Christ). "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone," - and these all from the house and lineage of Israel. Even our great Gentile apostle, the incomparable Paul, reminds us v. 1: I too am (not: was!) an Israelite! There has been no lack of great, spiritually anointed, gifted men of God in the Christianity of the nations. But apostles and prophets, mediators and proclaimers of the great revelation of God to mankind are not to be found there. This is not a meaningless coincidence, nor arbitrariness or whim. God could just as well have found and called men to such service and office among the Gentiles who had become believers in Christ. But his gifts of grace and calling are incalculable. Israel remained and will remain for all coming ages the exclusive bearer of all divine communication of salvation to mankind. The root carries us, not we the root.

This single consideration should have been sufficient to thoroughly preserve Christendom from conceited boasting against the branches that have fallen into judgment, let alone from deadly anti-Semitism. It should also have reminded us constantly of the debt of gratitude we owe to Israel, which probably did not believe its own Scriptures and yet justified them so poignantly. (Alongside this, however, Israel has also been a faithful guardian of the revelation of God entrusted to it. If one considers how today, especially in Protestant Christianity, and indeed officially, i.e. in the pulpit and at the lectern, the revealed words of God of the Old Testament, the Bible of Jesus and his apostles, are handled, then one is well justified in giving thanks that what God has spoken has not been entrusted to the present generation of Christians of the nations. It could happen in Israel that a defiant and presumptuous king Jehoiakim, in blind anger at the supposedly traitorous pessimism of a Jeremiah, cut up the scroll described in the words of Jehovah and threw it into the fire. But this is not to be compared with the outrageous, monstrous goings-on where, in the name of a proud scientificity, corrosive and corrosive unbelieving criticism is used to undermine the divine prestige of the Old Testament revelation, the same revelation of which the Only Begotten of the Father is the personal embodiment. For, he says, it is she who testifies of me. And this is not done by a rebellious monarch in a fit of childish defiance, but in the name of Christian theology, by decreed teachers and servants of the Word officially recognized as the revelation of God! If in Israel before and for centuries the scribes and Pharisees, i.e. the theological teachers and guardians of the truth, had acted in this way, what would we still have of our Bible?

Thus the wisdom of God is also justified by this generation in the choice of those whom he set as caretakers and preservers of his revelation. But in a way that we only think with shudder of those who provide this justification in such a presumptuous way. Thank God, it remains: the root carries us, no matter how much the moles dig and burrow.

The word they shall let stand,

And have no thanks to it.

It has not the least to fear from all conceivable attacks that may be made on it. The word of the Lord remains forever!

Do not be haughty, but fear!

V. 19-21 You will now say, The branches are broken off, that I may be grafted in. Right; they were broken off through unbelief; but thou standest by faith. Be not haughty, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, that he will spare not thine also.

Paul foresees further objections on our part. The view of the mutual relationship between the unbelieving Israel and the grafted-in people's church, prophetically put into the mouth of Christianity here v. 19, has indeed taken hold in the broadest strata, among scholars and laymen. Almost everywhere the impression is prevalent and ingrained: Israel has forever forfeited all its national prerogatives. The judgment executed on it is final and irrevocable; they are and remain disinherited; the New Testament church is the "true Israel"; it enters completely into Israel's inheritance, whereby only that which is promised to Israel in earthly blessings is to be referred to the heavenly and otherworldly.

The fact that in the divine salvation a certain space and a special use, also in the still future ages, is intended and reserved for each of these two bodies, Israel as well as the congregation, wants to be understood only by a few. One is so strongly under the impression of the actual, now almost two millennia lasting elimination of Israel for this time, since salvation has come to the nations through Israel's fall, that one does not like to give room to the thought of a final completion of the divine council of love in the preparation of the congregation and of a resumption of God's broken off relations with the people of his choice to follow. For this, not only the popular thinking, but often also the theological thinking is still bound by the narrow limits of pre-Reformation, dogmatic shortsightedness, according to which the present age means the last time of salvation for mankind at all and the conclusion of this household the final winding up of all world and national historical movements. One insists on the fact that all aims of God must come to their discharge in and with this age. What cannot be accommodated in this framework, that must remain outside. And because Christianity has not been able to accommodate the Jew in the church so far, and has shown little desire and skill to undertake this, it finds it much easier to put him out without further ado and to sit quietly in Israel's place. A somewhat drastic, but with the prevailing mood against the Jew quite popular procedure.

How popular this view of the relations of Christianity with Israel, correctly foreseen by Paul, is, can easily be seen from the fact that for centuries it has been considered quite natural and unquestionable to add headings to a large number of chapters in the Prophets and Psalms in the editions of the Bible, according to which these words, originally intended and clearly addressed to Judah and Israel, are without further ado rewritten to the Church. Likewise, spiritual songwriters have extensively abetted this naive, certainly well-intentioned falsification of biblical designations. They make us sing dozens of songs in which Judah, Jerusalem, Zion and Canaan figure, but in such a way that a simple-minded Bible-believing Jew must ask in wonder: Where did these Christians get the right to take all this from us and claim it for themselves? The natural consequence of this is such an extensive confusion of concepts that today there are even preachers and theologians who can read even Rom. 11 only through these glasses, and to whom any thought that God has still intended something for natural Israel in the way of unfulfilled promises seems simply impossible.

How does Paul meet the objection: "The branches were broken out so that I could be grafted in"? The apostle does not deny that this is actually justified. After all, he was more qualified than anyone else to correctly judge the true facts of the matter. He was especially chosen and called by the great gardener to go out into the great, wide world of nations and to bring the "wildlings" from there with

full arms, so that they would be grafted into the good olive tree of divine planting. Paul is again an expert of the first rank. He can boast that this secret, hidden in God from the world and from the ages, was made known to him through special revelation. Rom. 16, 25; Eph. 3, 4-9; Col. 1, 26. 27. He is the mighty, relentless opponent of all Jewish-Christian attempts to push the Gentile believers down to a lower level. His letters to the Galatians and Romans bear witness to how fearlessly and steadfastly he has always stood up for the fact: In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor foreskin counts for anything, but a new creation.

Simply and soberly, without circumlocution or palliation, he also here pronounces the divinely passed and executed judgment: Right; they have been broken out through unbelief. But then he does not at all conclude what one has allowed oneself to conclude almost everywhere in the Christianity of the nations. We see that it is not at all necessary to cut off the top of God's serious and mighty acts of judgment against Israel or to weaken them in the least in order to achieve a justification of God's ways with the people of his choice. Rather, one may and must, as Paul does, face these facts fully and seriously. If only one had always done this in Christianity in the sense of Paul, then one would never have fallen into the folly that Israel's rejection was merely a matter of making room for us, the "true Israel," and assigning Israel's position to us completely.

The apostle concludes quite differently from the facts. They broke out through unbelief. The correctness of the first limb of this statement is not to be touched. The stubborn, defiant unbelief of Israel, which resented the preaching of the righteousness of faith by grace alone, without merit or the works of the law, was the cause of their departure. God, faithful to His promise, had offered them everything. But the word of preaching did not help, since those who heard it did not believe. That Christianity from the nations stands and can stand on no other foundation, in so far as it stands at all, than that of the obedience of faith, needs no proof in the case of evangelical Christians. However, in the same evangelical Christianity a much more serious consideration of this basic truth would be appropriate.

"Do not be haughty, but fear! "warns the apostle. This does not sound very reassuring for the Christianity of our days in view of the undeniable fact that unbelief is leavening more and more layers of the very nations where the light of the Gospel shines brightest and where most of the great deeds of God are done. The most alarming thing is that those who are set up as guardians and watchmen in the Church are allowed to undermine with impunity the foundation of revelation on which the whole edifice of our most holy faith rests.

In addition, today's Christianity is convinced and taken in by its superiority and excellence to a very high degree. They like to preach that the church and Christianity have never been better. And as the disciples once pointed out to the deeply troubled master, so many today point out to the troubled and distressed: "Behold, what stones and what a building! "It is true and should not be denied that, in comparison with earlier centuries, today we are confronted with missionary successes on the outside and with a widespread and varied activity of love on the inside, which in itself offers much to be pleased about. It did not even occur to the Master to deny that the glory, greatness and splendor of the temple of that time and its well-tended cultus really stood before him. He also saw all this, as well as the disciples. Only this could not blind him to the true inner state of Judaism at that time. Certainly at no other time since the days of Solomon had the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem reached a higher stage of splendid development. No government since the son of David had expended more splendid effort to make the service of Jehovah pompous than the Edomite Herod. Even outwardly a zeal was displayed to make proselytes for the "true religion" which earlier times had not known. And only forty years later, not one stone of the proud edifice was left standing that had not been broken!

There is an increased and heightened heart activity in the human organism, which only deceives the uninformed; the knowledgeable physician recognizes and fears the wasting fever. And on the cheeks

of certain patients there is a blush, which the vernacular aptly calls "churchyard roses". The sick person himself declares that he has never been better, that he is on the mend, while the feet of those who carry him out are already at the door. The eager, here and there almost feverish busyness of today's Christianity must not deceive us. Their inner life is not healthy. Its noblest organs, the family, the church and the school, are ailing in the most alarming way. In the camp of its leaders and supporters there is a rigid, ossified Phariseeism and Orthodoxism here, and a disintegrating, ever more insolent Sadduceeism there. In addition, there is no lack of modern Herodians who call everything Christian that wears the purple and go through thick and thin with the ruling world power.

We do not want to and do not need to be blind to the many delicious manifestations of divine powers of grace and healing. Had there ever been anything in Jerusalem in the past that could compete with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the young church? Never! Even many priests at that time became obedient to the gospel. Truly, the disciples of those days, who loved their people ardently and had recognized the true hope of Israel, could well have thought that, with a natural, steady development of the vital forces working in the people, there would nevertheless gradually come a national rebirth. But the outcome of that great, glorious revival period in Jerusalem was not national conversion and renewal, but national judgment and rejection. But if at that time such an abundance of God's graces on the Jewish national soil did not avert the execution of the sentence of condemnation, with what right do people today point to the great deeds of God among the Christian nations as if they were as many proofs of the unimpeded, quiet progress of things and the continuance of ecclesiastical conditions? Historically judged, this is not. We know that people never tire of talking and writing about the necessity and possibility of a new baptism of the Spirit. Yes, one even behaves here and there as if only a united effort on our part is needed, and such an effort cannot fail! As if one could banish the spirit with formulas and set it free again! All these are frighteningly serious symptoms. No doubt, quite similar ideas and moods prevailed among the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people in the days before the catastrophe. The very fact that today, among all the decomposing and unbelieving trends and currents, with all the obvious apostasy from the simplicity of the Gospel, we have so many glorious deeds of God and so many vigorous revivals of true Christianity to record, wants to appear to us as one of the very clearest signs that the great, professing, but inwardly unbelieving Christendom, like Israel once, is becoming more and more rapidly ripe for its final elimination.

This much is certain, the serious warning of the apostle: "Do not be arrogant, but be afraid" was not taken to heart in the Christianity of the nations. To the scrutinizing eye, the marks of that Laodicean church are becoming more and more apparent. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and altogether full, and have need of nothing; and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and poor, and blind, and bare. " Well do penitential and prayer days stand in the calendars of Christendom, and they are kept with zeal and severity. But where is the spirit of really serious, sincere repentance and conversion?

The deepest tragedy here is the fact that this warning is not based on a perhaps contestable application of an Old Testament prophet's word, but is to be read on the pages of the so much used and rightly so highly esteemed Epistle to the Romans. From the epistle, which has become fundamental in a very special way for all today's knowledge of salvation and truth, it cries out to evangelical Christianity: "For if God has not spared the natural branches, neither will he spare yours!

The natural branches can again only be the natural Israel, namely the Israel that fell into unbelief and the subsequent separation. That God has not spared them must be testified to him not only by Christianity, but by Israel itself and the whole world of nations that has experienced Israel's history. After all, it was precisely the Christianized peoples who best understood how to forge the sharpest and most powerful weapons for the justification and defense of the faith in God's rule in history, as well as for the conviction of the stubbornly unbelieving Jews themselves, from the fact that Israel had fallen prey to God's righteous judgment. Behold, they cry out to them, how God has avenged

on you what you have done, that you have despised and abandoned the Holy One of Israel. Look where you have come as a people because of your unbelief! Your land is a desert! Your beloved city a miserable heap of rubble! Your sanctuary wiped out from the face of the earth! Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles to this day! Yes, one knows excellently in the poignant history of Israel, when it is necessary to reproach them for their sin!

But does anyone seriously think that this very Christianity, which believes itself called to reproach Israel for its unbelief, could and will one day suffer the same fate as Israel and Jerusalem suffered in their time? Who imagines that our stately churches and cathedrals with their heavenly towers, their consecrated bells, their decorated altars, their full-sounding organs will also sink into ruins? That our vaunted culture might be a prey to destruction, our Christian capitals and residences reduced to rubble? Or are they more holy, more worthy, more inviolable than that temple in Jerusalem, which the Son of God himself called my Father's house? What is there in our entire Christian and ecclesiastical apparatus and household, in all pious institutions and foundations, in all imposing buildings, that would in itself offer a better guarantee for enduring and remaining when the storm of wrathful judgment once breaks over unfaithful, apostate Christendom?

We have chairs of church history in all universities of the country filled with excellent men. They show us in great detail how and why Christianity, planted by the apostles of the Lord Jesus himself, fell into decay in Asia Minor and how Islam made a gruesome mess of it. We also do world history and analyze precisely and sharply the causes of the horrible French Revolution, which only a hundred years ago passed to the official abolition of the Christian religion. And in addition, so that nothing is lacking, the "eternal Jew" passes by our door every day, whom a merciful God has placed just for us Christian peoples as a living warning and preaches to us silently and yet so eloquently that "God has not spared the natural branches, that he will not spare yours either! "

Certainly, we know exactly, theoretically and practically; we are knowers, if there ever were knowers. We have no excuse. But who believes it that similar judgments, only in greater extent and with greater sharpness must hit our much more brightly enlightened Christendom. Whether the word of God will not be right after all? Whether the conclusion of this time of salvation will not show that all the world is guilty before God, and that he alone is justified in the wisdom of his ways with the children of men? Israel, the people of choice, has made disdainful fiasco with all its advantages and privileges. With the Gentiles, while the nations are entrusted with the Gospel, will it have a substantially different outcome? As far as history goes, it does not seem so. However, the Christianity of our days seems to think that it is far superior to all the generations that have been put to the test so far. Yes, it is thought in wide circles, especially among Christians of English tongue, that one is called and enabled to give such a turn to the course of things in the religious field by modern methods, aids and combinations that one will not only leave far behind all the successes hitherto achieved in the field of external and internal mission, but the church will also succeed in influencing, even dominating, social, national and even international legislation in such a way that actually the kingdom of peace and justice will be brought about on earth; not through judicial catastrophes, but by way of gradual, progressive development. Paul obviously does not share such expectations of Gentile Christianity, as he further gives us to understand.

Otherwise you will be cut out too

V, 22: Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God: against them that are fallen severity; but against thee the goodness of God, if thou continuest in goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

The repeated reference to the visual instruction in the large, national style, which God gave us other peoples in Israel, is immensely emphatic. Now, comparisons, such as we have already made above,

are not always welcome, especially if the view is thereby directed to such an unpleasant object as the Jew has become. But their justification cannot be denied in the light of this Scripture. It is true, after all, that Israel had in its prophets faithful and incorruptible watchmen who raised their voices loudly and unsparingly reproached their people for their sin and apostasy from Jehovah. As Paul writes in ch. 10:21 in his vindication of God's judicial ways, "Of Israel he says, all day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. " But who could claim that Christianity has lacked equally serious, apostolic admonitions and warnings from the beginning? After all, most of the letters of the apostles to the churches are largely devoted to the very purpose of pointing out to us not only the dangers threatening from without, but also the powers of ruin and apostasy that are active and stirring in the bosom of the church. Therefore, as far as extensive scriptural admonitions are concerned, we certainly do not lag behind Israel. God could have left it at that, without being guilty of partiality.

But he has done something else for us, and in addition to all this he has given something to Christianity, which Israel did not have in the same degree and to the same extent. This is the visual lesson of the judged, blinded people of divine choice already mentioned above. Certainly, God could have carried out the chastisement of his people in such a way that the other nations did not need to be constant witnesses of it. Israel, for example, could have disappeared from the eyes of the nations somewhere in the interior of Africa or Asia and remain hidden and yet be kept for the time of gracious visitation. But God has arranged it differently. He has used the other nations, in correct foreknowledge of their future behavior against his chosen people, first as chastising rods to show his wrath on Israel. In addition, he gave especially the nations, which were Christianized early, the fullest opportunity to have their attention on Israel, the landmark of world history, the miracle people of all times. It is not by chance, nor has it had its significance only for Israel, that the Jews, according to the majority, for more than fifteen centuries, had to have their main residences among the Christianized peoples of Europe. And what a history it has been that they have lived there and are still living! It has literally come true what the Lord had already called out to the proud nations through Zechariah 1:15: "I have been a little angry with Israel; but the nations have helped to the calamity. " Israel must not complain about it, of course. Compared with his appallingly presumptuous cry, "His blood upon us and upon our children! ", which the fathers cast out, and which the children, by their continued disobedience, still justly allow to stand, Jehovah is right when he says: "I have been angry but a little! "

All this should have served us and our fathers through the centuries to see the goodness and the severity of God: against those who have fallen, severity; but against you, goodness of God. Thus it has been written on the leaves of this epistle for almost two millennia. Probably no part of the divine word has been theologically treated more often and more extensively than this Epistle to the Romans. Nowhere in the Bible are evangelical Christians more at home. And this teaching and warning? For apologetic purposes it has been used gladly enough. But not for one's own rebuke. Although it is written: To whom much is given, of him much will be required. Christianity cannot say one day, when God demands an account, "We did not know and did not think that you would take it so seriously. The Jew, who drank the cup of divine wrath before their eyes, who could not find a resting place anywhere as a cursed and exiled one, will stand against them and testify. He was the embodiment of God's severity in judgment for them.

"But against thee the goodness of God, if thou continuest in goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. "From the whole context it is easy to see what is to be understood by the goodness of God. It is not one of the many attributes of His nature, not a theological or metaphysical concept, with which we are dealing here in the abstract; but much more does Paul want to summarize in this one word everything that has happened in the unexpected, undeserved and incalculable presentation of salvation and salvation remittance of God to the world of nations of this age. It is the short but

appropriate expression for the high position, which was assigned to the rejected Israel of the Christianity of the nations by God.

The apostle's addition makes it clear that this high privilege and distinction is not unconditional, but even less irrevocable. If you remain in goodness; otherwise! - Israel's present privileged position lasted from its origin as a nation, i.e. from the Exodus from Egypt, until the destruction of the city and temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., altogether about fifteen centuries. The present age now already lasts four centuries longer, so that also in this respect there is no reason for us to object that God has not given us as long time and opportunity as Israel to prove it, whether we understand it better to respond to his intentions for this course of time.

The only question that remains to be answered here is: Has the international Christian congregation of this age remained in the goodness of God? It depends only on it whether it will be left in its position or whether the judgment of the cutting out will be carried out on it as well. For, according to v. 21, it is out of the question that God will spare us in the guilty case.

It should be pointed out here again that the question of individual reprobation or blessedness is not at all involved here. The questions of personal salvation, justification, sanctification and redemption, have found a thorough discussion by the apostle in the first eight chapters of the letter. It is not the individual believer here whose preservation or rejection is being negotiated. Only the salvation-economic position and privilege - there Israel, here the nations under the gospel of God's goodness - is in question. Failure to recognize this distinction can only confuse. So it boils down to whether in the course of this time of the nations the nations-Christianity as such proved to be faithful and persevering in the goodness of God, in certain contrast to Israel's disgraceful disobedience and apostasy.

The question takes a twofold form. Either one can ask in this way: Has the entirety of the people's churches in their great historical course of development passed this test? Can we unhesitatingly and with confidence state such a gratifying result from the church history of these nineteen centuries? We believe that no honest and thorough connoisseur of history will have the heart to answer it with a joyful yes.

Or, one can also ask: Are there among the large historical individual groups of national, people's, state and free churches one or the other, which would have remained in an outstanding and quite unmistakable way in what was given to it by the goodness of God as equipment on the way? Are there any notable exceptions of church communities which, through centuries (or decades), would not have left the "first love", would not have fornicated with the world in any form, but would have remained unsullied by it? It cannot be important here to investigate or determine on which side, whether in Constantinople or Rome or Wittenberg or Geneva or London, the greater indebtedness, the more serious apostasy, the deeper ruin would be recorded. Nothing would be improved by this, nor would it be gained for the clarification of the matter. To cast the first stone at the woman taken in flagrant adultery is still today for the zealous elders of enlightened Protestant Christendom tied to the same condition: who among you is without sin! Those Jewish elders in the Gospel, however, seem to have had a more tender conscience. For they quietly departed at this word of the Lord, while in our days there are still enough stones hailing at this great whore here and that one there!

Or, among all the evangelical church bodies of all countries, is there a single one that is without sin, not guilty of any apostasy, of any boasting with the powers of this age? We would like to remind you of only two points, not to judge or condemn, but to urge you to bow down and repent. What has become of the unity of the Body of Christ under our hands? What kind of answer would an Israelite from the interior of Poland, for example, who had become a believer in Christ, receive when he first came among the professing evangelical Christians, who knew the church of Jesus Christ only from the descriptions in the New Testament, and who would now ask: Where is it then, the church of my Lord and Savior, the temple of the living God, pillar and foundation of truth?

Or the other: What has been made of the word of the living God in the same circles? The abominations that would have to be recorded here alone bring the Old Testament parallel to mind vividly. There it stood with Israel, the ten-tribe kingdom, sadly enough. But of the higher pardoned (Protestant) Judah the prophets must testify that she had made her sister downright pious by her idolatry. Truly, neither the Eastern Roman nor the Western Roman Church has ever so shamefully violated the glory of the revelation of God that has become ours, as it is allowed to happen on cathedrals and pulpits of the Protestant Christianity - under "all green trees and on all high hills" - in the name of a proud scientificity. Times of conversion, periods of reformation existed also in Israel. There, too, it was not an unbroken chain of noisy apostate leaders of the people. But by this the final judgment of condemnation was at most delayed, not prevented. It is a fatal, unforgivable self-deception, if in our days one refers to revivals, revitalizations and other delicious grants of grace of an infinitely long-suffering God, only to keep away from oneself and others the thought of the immense, constantly accumulating corporate guilt and the solidary liability for outdated, contemporary atrocities in this area.

Our verdict has been reached and is clearly on record here. There can be no honest doubt about our guilt. Oh that only among us Protestants there were more prayers of the stature of Daniel and Ezra, both of whom, although personally innocent, humbly confessed the clearly recognized and confessed guilt of their people. (Dan. 9, Ezra 9). That only the truth of God comes into its own, even if it has to go through the courts.

The re-grafting of the natural branches

V. 23. 24: And also those, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the wild olive tree by nature and grafted into the noble olive tree against nature, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.

The comparison between Israel and Christianity from the nations has come to a prophetic conclusion. The parallel is complete up to the last end, the judgment of the cutting out. That in the Church of the Nations one nevertheless does not look forward to such an outcome of things as the Scripture here clearly predicts, that one almost universally firmly expects not only the undisturbed progress but a prosperous development and an increase of the existing, that one regards conclusions like those which we have drawn from this prophetic word almost as a betrayal of the victorious, triumphant future of the Church on earth, all this cannot surprise a sober researcher of the word of prophecy. All this has also been there before. Jeremiah was tried in his time precisely because of such treasonous statements. If Jesus had submitted his prophecy of the near collapse of the things at that time to the highest church authority, the theological experts of his days for the examination, probably nothing else would have taken place on it than a repeated: this man is nonsensical, he has the devil! The parallel would not be complete if it were different in our generation.

But, it will be replied, did not Jesus himself promise a victorious permanence to the church which he founded on the rock of Peter's confession, since he promised her that "the gates of Hades should not overpower her". However, Jesus clearly made this promise, nor do we want to remotely question it. But he is not responsible for the skewed and unfounded conclusions drawn from it; still less for the abuse of which the designation "my church" has been guilty in Christendom. To sober up, we first recall again our Israelite example and let us be told that "not all who are of Israel are these Israel", nor because they are Abraham's seed are all children. Where one is eager to impute to the Lord without further ado a congregational concept that has become historical, according to which everything that is baptized in or with water constitutes the congregation, then of course the door is wide open for excessive arbitrariness of interpretation. Thus the retrospective view of the lot of the

congregations of Syria, Asia Minor and North Africa founded by the apostles and disciples of the apostles should sufficiently demonstrate that Jesus' word must by no means be interpreted to the effect that any or even all historical forms of the church on earth should be of imperishable duration. How great and glorious the Lord's promise is in truth will only be revealed on the day when this mortal will put on immortality and this corruptible will put on incorruption, namely when in the future of the Lord the dead in Christ will rise first, the living and the remaining will be transformed and all will stand as a perfected organism of glory, according to the glory of his transfigured body. For only then, according to 1 Cor. 15:54, will death be swallowed up in victory and the true church of the Lord will celebrate its triumph over the gates of Hades. Church hopes and this world's plans for the future, based on arbitrary interpretation of scripture, must do a great fall.

Also in this history repeats itself and the parallel with Israel gains increased completeness, that one is penetrated in Christianity on the deepest by the own indispensability for the execution of the great divine salvation thoughts and kingdom plans with mankind. Whoever can and will visualize how one thought 1900 years ago in the then authoritative religious circles, among scribes and laymen, about the usability of the nations in the divine household, has the right point of view for the assessment of the way one thinks today in international Christian circles about a possible reuse of the people of Israel once thrown aside. Quite apart from the quite groundless assumption, as if the present time of salvation was the very last one for mankind on earth. This theory, of course, has done much to strengthen present-day Christianity in the delusion that everything that remains unfinished in this age must remain so for all time. To what miserable bankruptcy one thereby condemns the great, glorious, wise Lord of the ages, one does not realize, of course. For if our age really had to bring and effect the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, then it has been a total failure in its course so far. It is obvious that 1900 years of gospel have been quite insufficient so far, even among peoples among whom a relative righteousness is established. Of course, this does not prevent our present generation from believing all the more firmly in its own superiority over all previous generations. But how in this, even among the most advanced peoples, a thoroughgoing change is to be created without a change in the divine principles of administration which underlie this age, is not to be foreseen. For as long as the powers of darkness are allowed to work in this age, before a new economy of salvation with essentially changed foundations has been introduced, no radical change can be brought about. It is folly and foolishness, for example, to try to dry up a stream whose powerful source cannot be blocked. Only if one could put a stop to the spirit, which at this time, according to God's wise counsel, "has its work in the children of disobedience" and put a stop to the whole seductive activity of the powers of the air and the masters of this course of time - only then could change be created in church, society and politics. If only people, at least in decidedly faithful circles, would remember the high goal that the Father has set for the Son through the Spirit in this age, namely that the Son is the firstborn among many brothers who are all to be transformed into the likeness of His image. Can the sons attain to divine greatness other than the firstborn? Is it no longer necessary in the twentieth century that just as he was in this world, so also we should be? And what was he? A man rejected and despised by the world! How can one set up in one breath the elimination and overcoming of all world enmity through the Gospel and then still want to raise true sons of God in a converted and tidy world? If the Son of God had to put up with being tempted by the devil, what right do sons of God have to wish for a different order. It would undoubtedly be more pleasant and easier to live in a thoroughly purified and reformed world; but true sons of God, of the type of the firstborn, cannot mature in such a world. They have to overcome evil not by eliminating it with reforms and ordinances, but by standing in the midst of it, being and remaining overcomers through Him who loved them unto death.

That there is so little understanding in Christendom for the divine plan of the ages and for the differences of the individual periods and orders to which they are subordinated is very much to be lamented, but not so easily excused. For we are the generation on which the ends of the ages have

come, i.e. the manifestation of all the great purposes of divine activity in mankind. Only in our course of time was the mystery of the body of Christ revealed, of which Paul declares that it remained hidden in God from the world and from the ages until it was revealed to him for us. In the same way, it was only to the New Testament church that the revelation of Jesus Christ through His servant John became known, in which the consummation of the mystery of God is set forth. In the possession of such sources of light, we truly have less excuse than Israel, if we either go along in self-sufficient ignorance, or take self-chosen paths in our work. The one is as fatal as the other. The actual blindness of Christianity in the face of its own approaching judgment of condemnation provides the painful proof.

The spirit of prophecy, however, directs the gaze of our apostle firmly to "those". That no one else can be meant than the people of Israel, who are still blinded today, is unmistakable from the context. The addition "if they do not remain in unbelief" raises it above all doubt. According to this, when the people's Christianity has become ready to speak and has been "cut out" from further use in the divine plan of administration, God will resume the former official relations with Israel as a people.

We are obviously at a turning point of the ages here. God has been right. He has completed the mystery of the church, the body of Christ, in the midst of the aberrations and perversities of the great church of the nations. Through "selflessness" and the gospel of mankind, the latter has arrived at the glorification of the "superman", i.e. the "beast". But God had and will have through the whole course of time until the evil end his 7000, who do not worship the beast of mankind nor take his mark, but who attain the sonship as the disowned and crucified of the world. With its self-glory the proud, Christianized world of nations has been thoroughly disgraced. The judgment overtakes them, surely and inevitably, as once Israel.

Who then is to be God's messenger and witness on earth? The heavenly church is completed and has gone to its place. The great, historical, glorious Christianity from the nations is unfit - salt that has become stupid, neither cold nor warm, therefore trampled and spat out. There the look of the spirit of Paul rests on "those", if they do not remain in unbelief. This would not be the first time that God chose the weak, despised and ignoble things of the world and the things that are not, in order to put to shame the strong and glorious things, so that no flesh would boast before Him (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

But is it anywhere in Scripture that Israel as a whole will not persist in its unbelief? It does, and very clearly. Here, however, we do not want to go into this question yet, but rather discuss it in the discussion of v. 26, where Paul announces the future salvation of all Israel in clear words.

First, we still let our eyes rest on the word: "God is able to graft them in again". This is the same God who brought it upon himself to execute such a terrible judgment on the people of his choice, whom he loved with eternal love Jer. 31, 3 and marked in his palms Isa. 49, 16. The expression "grafting in again" evidently envisages nothing less than a complete annulment of the judicially brought about "cutting out," though again we must not disregard the fact that in this whole execution of the apostle we are not dealing with the conditions of personal salvation, not with individual redemption or damnation, but with corporate reception and use in the divine council of salvation. We are faced, at first, only with the possibility of a restoration of Israel as a people (in which, after all, a rejection of individuals can be thought of) to its former, privileged position as bearer and mediator of divine truth to mankind.

If it is asked to what kind of mankind Israel's mission will be addressed in the future age, we answer, to those remaining from the coming judgments. We do not believe that the conversion of the whole world is to be expected in this age, which would in fact render Israel's missionary activity obsolete; nor, on the other hand, that the end of the world is to be placed at the close of this age in the sense that world history would be finally concluded with it. Rather, in spite of the enormous crises and

catastrophes that will come over the world, mankind will continue to exist according to the Scriptures, and there will also be peoples and nations afterwards, in which the re-grafted Israel will probably have to solve a great task and will also solve it.

The tendency, so deeply rooted in us Gentile Christians, to object from the outset to all God's great purposes with despised Israel, Paul now counters with a striking demonstration. "For if you are cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and grafted contrary to nature into the noble olive tree, how much more will the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree! " This is a deeply shameful rejection of our chronic doubting of Israel's national future. We were the wildlings by nature, that is, without genetic connection to the people of the covenant and the testaments of promise. For our benefit, God turns the natural order upside down. For grafting in fruit culture depends primarily on good, noble vines. Such we were not. Whoever wanted to graft wild branches, such as sloes or crab apples, even into the most noble fruit trees, would never get anything but wild, inedible fruit from the sown wild shoots. God has performed this miracle of grace on us from the nations and by engrafting us wildlings into the noble olive tree of the originally pure Israelite community of divine planting, he has managed to obtain noble fruit for the kingdom of God from wildlings as well.

How much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree, Paul continues. Therein lies, first of all, the very high degree of probability pronounced when looking at the question of Israel's national reabsorption into the divine plan of operation. That is, if such a great thing could happen to us Gentiles, then it is indeed a lesser and nearer procedure of God if the natural branches, hitherto broken off, lying there barren and unfruitful, are grafted in again. In this way, the Scriptures effectively shut our mouths, as happened in chapters 9 and 10 of this epistle with Israel, which at that time had rebelled against God's procedure. The justification of God's ways is perfect.

But another thought also comes to light. It is said that the natural branches are to be grafted into their own olive tree. In this it seems to us to be clearly expressed that a reception or an absorption of Israel on the part of the international Christian community was not to be thought of at all in this course of time. The history and results of the mostly half-hearted and sporadic efforts to bring salvation in Christ to the people of Israel provide evidence for the correctness of these interpretations. We believe, however, that a much more earnest and faithful evangelization among Israel would never have resulted in the Israelite stock of the people being absorbed into the historic Church of the Nations. That forcible conversions of Jews do not lead to such a goal is historically proven. While today the mere fact that half of the Jewish population of the earth has its residence in the land of midnight makes it almost inaccessible for free and proselytizing evangelization work.

Secondly, we see in this expression a clear indication of the way in which, towards the end of this course of time, the divine procedure of re-grafting Israel will take place. They will not be incorporated and taken up into one or another of the many historical branches of the Christian people's church, but into their own olive tree. So it will be towards the end of this course of time that a national Jewish-Christian church or synagogue will again be formed and shaped. The end will return to the beginning.

Not the Gentile-Christian, but the still purely Jewish-national congregation in Jerusalem was the beginning and the pledge of all great national-Israelite promises of God to his people. Its withdrawal, however, does not mean abandonment, as Paul clearly showed us, but only a postponement of the fulfillment of all that God promised to His people through the mouth of His holy prophets from of old. The entrance of the Gentile Christianity means a mystery of divine ways, the formation of a body not seen by the prophets of Israel, the body of Christ, in which true believers, but only such, from both classes, Jews and Gentiles, have equal share, equal position, equal inheritance. The Jewish-Christian congregation existed long enough to provide evidence that God had not finally rejected His people. After this was historically corroborated in sufficient clarity, even if by no means

universally recognized, it could recede and finally disappear completely. The prophecy remained yes, the letter to the Romans was given.

The whole period, however, during which Christendom has been predominantly or exclusively under the sign of the nations, may be regarded at bottom as a great parenthesis, neither glimpsed nor reckoned in the whole of Old Testament prophecy, after the conclusion of which Jehovah resumes the original relations with the people of his choice where they were broken off. At that time, however, when Jerusalem was trodden down and a goal set for the Jewish cult and state system, there existed and flourished that remnant by grace's choice, a congregation of believers from Israel to whom the Holy Spirit had a special eye in the writing of the New Testament. This remnant formed and probably recognized itself as the deed proof of God's unbreakable faithfulness to the blinded whole of the people. The fact that the people's church, which had been left in its inheritance and had become aware of its sap and life, neither recognized nor accepted this, does not change the matter. But God will, without letting himself be stopped by the conceit of a proud people's Christianity, go over to the order of the day with Israel in his time and graft them into their own olive tree again.

It is therefore of great importance for the scriptural scholar and careful observer of the ways of God and the signs of the times to perceive what is beginning to take place before our eyes today precisely in this direction. For the first time in almost two millennia there is in Israel not a mere party of the people, but a mass reawakening to the most intense national consciousness, which has found its powerful expression in a series of national congresses, which purposefully and in a most respectable manner come before the great and governments of the earth with the demand of recognition as a people and the restitution of their homeland. Zionism has also succeeded in what mere argumentation could not, namely, to persuade the missionary circles working among Israel to take into account the factor of this newly arisen national consciousness in determining the methods of evangelization. It is truly time to seriously ask ourselves whether we have not worked into the hands of the sad Reform Judaism with its doctrine of assimilation and fusion long enough by merely proselytizing from Israel for the churches, and whether in the preaching of the Messiah of Israel the fact that the Risen Lord is in a special way the national hope of Israel should not have more space and validity than it has been given so far.

Meanwhile, the wonderful and hidden God of Israel, their Savior, has been quietly at work in His own way, preparing what the prophecy of the apostle gives us to expect. In the counsel of God, missionary work on a large scale among the compact masses of Jews in Eastern Europe was probably not indicated. But the same counsel had seen to it that, for example, in the great tsarist empire no considerable obstacles were placed in the way of the spread of the Word of God in book form. Thus thousands upon thousands of New Testaments in Hebrew, Yiddish and other dialects, intelligible to the people as well as to the learned, could be spread among Israel. And they were taken, often coveted and gladly bought. Thus, in broad strata of the Jewish people who still hold to the old faith, the New Testament is now no longer unknown, but much read and studied. There is no statistical evidence of the fruits of this sowing. Nor is there any need of them. The Lord has spoken that the word that comes out of his mouth shall not return to him empty, and shall accomplish what he pleases and carry out what he has sent it to do.

Like our painters and sculptors, only a few dogmatists have managed to depict a national-Jewish Messiah. There one sees Germanic, Spanish and Greek Christ types enough. Dogmatic and self-national opaque colors have made the born Jew almost unrecognizable for his own countrymen and brothers after the flesh. The prevailing missionary practice, proselytizing, has done its part. More than once the interjection has come to us from orthodox Jews: How can your Jesus be the Messiah of our people, since you dejudge every Jew whom you convert and baptize as quickly and thoroughly as possible?

But now it happens that the orthodox, Jewish people's soul is placed directly before the image of Christ in the New Testament itself. And in it they will certainly recognize their brother, flesh of their flesh. Attentive and well-informed observers of Jewish popular life bear witness to the gratifying fact that never, for centuries, has there been such a willingness among Israel to approach the question of the crucified One's Messiahship as in our day. It is common knowledge that the liberal Jewish circles claim Jesus ever more definitely as the Son of the Jewish people, as one of their noblest and greatest. We know well that from then to the faithful bowing under the cross, to the victorious, broken: My Lord and my God! there is still a long way to go. But it is unmistakable that there is a rustling and stirring among the dead bones of the whole house of Israel.

The fact that the previous attempts of a Joseph Rabinovich in Kishineff and some others to form Jewish-Christian congregations have not yet had any lasting success does not mean anything. We see in such men the missionaries confirmed by God for the people of choice. They are doing forerunner ministries. But their work and testimony are not therefore in vain. When the time comes, it will be found that God was not unprepared, but has provided ample material for the building up of a Jewish Christian church or synagogue, whose testimony of Christ, crucified and risen, will then be given again in Jerusalem into the ears of the whole house of Israel. "God may well graft them again into their own olive tree. "

The Mystery in Israel's Obduracy

V. 25: For I would not, brethren, that this mystery should be unknown unto you, lest ye should think yourselves wise: hardening hath happened in part unto Israel, until the fullness of the nations be come in.

How the incomprehensible grace and mercy of our God meets us here again, but also the wonderful faithfulness, harmony and consistency of this wonderful Bible book. Paul is only allowed to speak to fully entitled sons and heirs in this way, but it is also fitting. Others would not understand nor appreciate that God wants to introduce them to His deepest mysteries. True sons will hear and realize it with holy trembling, but with high joy. But how shameful and painful it is that in serious, Bible-believing circles one so often encounters a certain unwillingness to enter into God's mysteries at all. After all, people think and speak that they are fully occupied with their own salvation. The delicious, blessed fact: "Jesus died for me" - is emphasized in such a way that one forgets everything else above the "for me". The whole great plan of God's salvation is viewed and judged only from the standpoint of personal share and interest. What I can make useful and edifying for myself in the Word of God, that is read with pleasure. Where this does not go so easily, there remains much "unknown territory" in my Bible. That is not "for me," one excuses oneself. Thus it has come to the point with many believers that their sense and understanding for everything that does not directly relate to personal salvation and blessedness has become almost blunted and paralyzed. Often enough, this unwillingness to approach the revelatory mysteries of God surrounds itself with the aura of "practical sobriety". Only that which is directly conducive to the bliss of the soul is suitable for spiritual nourishment. The occupation with the mysteries of divine kingdom thoughts is virtually suspected as dangerous, because speculative and without practical value for the spiritual life.

Thus, the apostle does not meet us with a request for apology, because he wants to direct our contemplative thoughts away from ourselves and our own blessedness to one of the mysteries of God. Nor does it occur to him to ask us first whether we really have time for it, or whether it suits our spiritual taste. But he says emphatically: "Brothers, I do not want this mystery to be unknown to you! May the Crown Prince of the German Empire apologize to his imperial father, if he personally or through the Imperial Chancellor now also wants to introduce his son to the secrets of high

imperial politics? Can there be more important private business for him? May personal inclinations and moods have a say? Never! What else is he the appointed heir to the throne of a great empire for?

And in addition the motivation: "so that you do not think yourselves wise! "Oh, if only one could accuse the apostle of exaggerated concern here, based on the experience and the result of nineteen centuries. If one could prove that such a danger neither threatens us nor such a fate has really affected us. Both are impossible. God is right, and we are judged. How many clever, finely thought-out theological treatises on the fate and position of Israel have not appeared in print in our country! How many Christians did not believe that they could simply skip these three chapters 9-11 of the Epistle to the Romans in their study of the Bible without suffering any harm. After all, there is so little for edification in this passage full of deep, serious thoughts of God. And one believes oneself excused from the outset, because one does not have the theological equipment to be able to deal with these enormous problems. A layman could not understand that.

Then those believers in Rome were probably all philosophers, metaphysicians and trained theologians to whom Paul addressed this request? Or did Paul exceed his authority and expect more from us than is right and just before God? All these excuses are vain and mean nothing. What do we, as simple children of God, begotten of the Spirit, led by the Spirit into all truth, have to desire theological equipment, if it is nothing more than simple obedience of faith?

And now the secret. It is twofold. First, the hardening of Israel is limited in scope, "a part". Secondly, it is sharply limited in duration, "until that". The limitation expressed in the first clause is not unexpected. The apostle has already shown us in v. 5 that out of the mass of the unbelieving people a remnant had existed in the obedience of faith and had thus become the bearer and exponent of God's faithfulness against His promises. Verse 17 he implies that not all but some of the branches were broken off. We recognized, however, that this meant the great majority, but at least not the absolute totality of the people.

The other part of the secret is the definite opening that the judgment of hardening imposed on Israel will last only until a certain date, but not for all times. Both messages are certainly easy enough to understand, if one believes otherwise that God's word wants to be taken in its simple literal sense. How could it have happened that countless thousands, indeed the majority of Christianity of all centuries, have shown the right understanding neither for the one nor for the other part of this announcement? If it had been for the first part, more would have been done for poor blinded Israel to provoke them to emulation. And if for the latter, then one would never have fallen into the delusion of a final disinheritance or repudiation of the people. The actual attitude of most Christians to this day toward Israel once again justifies the sure prophetic eye of the warning apostle.

What has been shown here as the unpleasant fruit and effect of the unbelief of Christianity against a not at all misunderstandable revelation of God, is only one of the clearest samples of the whole sad situation and condition in which one has got into through the unhealthy and unjustified shyness before the prophetic word in general. One wants to be wiser than the Word, which declares that "all Scripture is given by God and is profitable" 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. One shuns God's mysteries and becomes an easy prey to all sorts of plausible human speculations and theories. The worst thing is that one loses the simplicity of mind that does not dare to doubt God's word and loses oneself in all kinds of attempts to get out of the plain text any other opinion than the one that is clearly revealed. Thus the Word of the Rock becomes a mere test object for human ingenuity and theological skill of manipulation. But God's word itself, which is useful for rebuke, contains the corrective for all such aberrations, to the one who bends simple-mindedly under what God has spoken. Ps. 116, 6: The Lord protects the simple. Or Matt. 6, 22: If your eye is simple, your whole body will be light.

We are now approaching the question to which the version of the last limitation for Israel's national hardening leads us: until the fullness of the Gentiles will have come in. What does the apostle want

to tell us with this? What is this fullness or fullness of the Gentiles? Where shall this have gone before Israel's blindness shall reach its end? These are legitimate questions, although they raise a number of difficulties.

One thing is very clear to us, and that is the wonderful wisdom of God, which has masterfully understood to pair the greatest certainty with an equally great indeterminacy. There can be no honest doubt about the fact that Israel will one day come out of its hardening. But when this will occur is incalculable for us. Even if we could explain with infallibility what is meant by the expression "fullness of the Gentiles," there would still remain the same residue of uncertainty as to the exact timing. But in this there is nothing strange for us. For it is exactly the signature that is peculiar to all New Testament revelations. That, for example, our transfigured Lord will not remain in heaven, but will one day return from heaven, resounds brightly to us like the sound of a trumpet from almost every page of the New Testament. But when this will happen? Who is able to say it? Countless attempts, continued through the centuries, to design a reliable calendar of the future have not yet had a satisfactory result. This is neither an oversight nor a coincidence. Rather, the Scripture clearly says that it is not our business to know time or times, and that you do not need it written down for you. And why not? We so easily think that our knowledge and recognition is deficient as long as we do not master the chronological sequence of events. Whereas in reality it is not at all important for the congregation of believers to know the time or the hour.

For a people with an earthly vocation, with earthly prospects, blessings and promises, all of which will take place and be fulfilled under the orders of the heavenly bodies, i.e. for Israel as a people, the matter is quite different. Israel was and will remain an earthly, for the future of the earth and its inhabitants determining, leading body, the head of the nations. The church of God, on the other hand, has been transferred together with its head to the heavenly regions, places, relationships, positions, or whatever one may translate. Eph. 2, 6. She is not a temporal but an eternal body. Its purposes and tasks, like those of its head, rise through and above all the heavens, subject to no change of times. Therefore, there are numbers and measures everywhere on the prophetic ground for Israel, but nowhere on that of the church, i.e. in the Pauline letters.

A look back at the cross and forward to the future of our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us how true the apostle's judgment is that "you have no need of times and dates being written down for you". What is it that deprives us of our faith in the Crucified and Risen One, that almost nineteen centuries separate us from the events of those acts of God to which the church owes its existence? Or are we at a disadvantage, as far as the powers of Christ's death and resurrection are concerned, compared to those first disciples who themselves stood under the cross? Decidedly not! It is the same when looking out into the future of the Lord. Does the believing, hopeful congregation of today have more profit, strength, comfort and blessing from the delicious promise: "Behold, I am coming soon! because it has undeniably come many centuries closer to the event than the first Christians? No! It is clearly evident that the merely chronologically greater approximation has by no means brought about a corresponding increase in the joy of hope of today's believers before those of the time of the apostles. From this it appears irrefutably that the spiritual and moral value of these deeds of God cannot be measured by the calendar, nor can it be increased or diminished by it. The simple reason is that we walk precisely in faith and not (as Israel once did and will do) in seeing the things of God. Wisdom is justified by her children.

But back to our question about the fullness of the Gentiles. It will be easier to say what we think it cannot mean than to establish beyond all doubt what it really denotes. What light does the rest of Scripture throw on this point?

We encounter a word of the Lord Jesus in Luke (21, 24) which seems to coincide in more than one respect with what Paul wants to say here. The Lord, who sketches out for his disciples the shape of the age ahead of them, characterizes it with regard to the chosen seat of God's reign on earth, the

city of the great King, Jerusalem, as follows: "Jerusalem will be trodden down by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled".

The point of view of the Lord is unmistakably the political one, while that of the apostle is just as unmistakably the religious one. Now, according to the whole biblical exposition, it belongs to Israel's peculiarity that it is neither a mere state nor a mere religious community. Rather, it is both united, an actual state of God, the Kingdom of Jehovah on earth. In view of this peculiar dual character, we may, indeed must, expect both sides of its organic constitution to be taken into account, wherever its organic future is spoken of in connection with it. But this is the case in both places, here as well as in the eschatological speech of the Lord. It would be simply inconceivable, given the divine perfection of scriptural revelation, that such a tremendous crisis, such a great turning point in the future of God's people, should be taken into account only from one side, as Paul does here. It is rather quite appropriate that the Messiah himself illuminates that political side, as it happens in his speech in Luke.

To this end, the whole of Jehovah's previous pedagogical procedure with his people in both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities has clearly demonstrated that Israel's apostasy and disobedience to its theocratic king will be visited, punished, and actually corrected by political measures. Israel's sin is atoned for through exile. Its national humiliation, weakening and surrender to the nations is the expression and measure of divine displeasure. From this it is clear that Jesus and Paul were undoubtedly looking at the same period in Israel's national life, although their language is of course not the same. It is unmistakable that in Israel religious indebtedness always runs parallel with political humiliation and vice versa. That is, there is no other way to think of a political restoration of Israel than in the wake of a religious rebirth. But it should be equally self-evident that with Israel, according to the whole analogy of its history so far, a purely spiritual renewal without a political restitution as a true state of God is not to be thought of. It would amount to a palpable fiasco of divine measures with the people of his choice. For it is with Israel that God has undertaken not only to flow spiritual blessings and goods to mankind, but it is as much a matter of the great problems of world government, political and social legislation and administration by the Son of Abraham and David, i.e., the old controversy between the prince of this world, and the one to whom the Father hands over all judgment because he is the Son of Man. Jehovah still owes the world the factual proof that this Son of Man is really the best and most successful regent and judge for poor, raped humanity on earth. The fact that Christianity would like to limit him to heaven and would rather take care of the reforming and governing here on earth, allegedly on his behalf, will not prevent the final execution of the divine plan with the Son of David, thank God. After one has run down and become thoroughly bankrupt in the process, one will nevertheless shout: Hosanna, praise be to him who comes in the name of the Lord!

So both scriptural words, that of the Lord Jesus and that of his apostle, really serve here for mutual explanation and completion. When Jesus says there about the historical lot of the beloved city: Jerusalem will be trodden down by the nations until - this unmistakably covers the same painful period of Israelite people's history of which Paul shows us the other side when he says: by her fall salvation to the nations, her loss the wealth of the nations (v. 11. 12). Thus, we believe we are fully justified in concluding that Jesus' statement: until the times of the nations will be fulfilled - envisages exactly the same point in time that Paul formulates here from the spiritual, religious point of view: until the fullness of the nations will have come in.

In other words, the time of the nations is the same course of time in which what Paul calls the fullness or fullness of the nations is to be prepared. With this we think we have achieved so much for our investigation that we can first of all eliminate two views as insufficient, which are offered to us by exegetes. According to the one, by the fullness of the Gentiles would be understood such a number of converts from the nations as would be necessary to cover the loss to the kingdom of God

brought about by Israel's unbelief. According to this, the aim and task of the Holy Spirit through the gospel in this time of salvation would be nothing else than a grand correction of God's failed ways, the compensation of an unforeseen miscalculation. But the apostle's explanations in verses 2 and 11 are sufficient to keep away any thought of a mere making good of a harm unexpectedly done by Israel. Such a view of the character and significance of the fullness of the nations simply does not fit into this chapter. It is altogether too mechanical and patchwork, without understanding of the great, unified, planned work and activity of our God in all ages, even through Israel's fall.

Rather, the other interpretation could be heard, according to which first all nations of the earth must become partakers of the blessings of the gospel, enter into the church of the nations, only then can and will it come to the national admission also of Israel as the last people into the kingdom of God (by which, of course, the church of the nations is understood). The tacit assumption is that such a process will not take place through judgment and rejection of the apostate Christianized world of nations, but rather in the way of peaceful, progressive development of the Kingdom of God on earth. Only Israel would have to wait until the end. Only after it has seen how all other nations before it bow to the blessed scepter of the Messiah, it will also give up its foolish resistance and "enter". The first and sharply limited admonitions and announcements of judgment of the apostle are thereby treated as non-existent or not applicable.

After all, there is more truth in this view than in the theory of repair rejected above. But it, too, is opposed by serious doubts. First of all, it does not offer the believing mind a conceivable final point of rest, as the divine promise certainly envisages. For it cannot be seen from the course of Christianity in the world of nations during these nineteen centuries how and when the coming into being and passing away again, the blossoming and withering or rotting away in the way of the previous development is to find a conclusion. When would then Israel's turn come? Which would be the penultimate of the nations for which it would still have to wait? There are more nations on earth today than at the time when Israel's rejection came into effect. Since then, some nations have been reached by the gospel, others have not. Several, for example, the Aztecs, Incas, Pueblos and others have simply been wiped out by their conquerors, some have passed from the scene of history before they could recognize the gospel. Two-thirds of mankind today still knows nothing of the Gospel of Christ. And among the Christianized third, whole nations, by far the majority, have sunk back into idolatry, formism, unbelief and paganism. That these conditions are included and provided for in the plan of the divine world order for this age suffers no doubt. But there is no guarantee against abuse, corruption or perversion in the factors and forces which God allows to be effective during this aeon. The world of nations has been left full liberty to draw upon the grace of God bestowed upon it for wantonness. In which horrible extent it has made use of it, is evident. We fully subscribe to everything that can rightly be said about the sufficiency of the powers of salvation and life that lie in the Gospel and are freely available to us, not only for salvation but also for preservation. We also believe that it would be well within the realm of possibility to enlighten the whole world with the light of the Gospel in a single human age. Nor do we doubt that whole peoples could take hold of the salvation offered to them if this were in accordance with the will of God. But it is not in accordance with reason, experience or Scripture to persuade ourselves and others that our generation will do things quite differently in this respect from all previous ones; that the Gospel will find a different reception and more faithful preservation among the peoples to whom it is brought in the twentieth century than it did in the fifth or twelfth. More powerful potencies have never been effective on earth until this day than they have been effective for an age in Jerusalem after Pentecost. They did not stop the judgment of Israel, but accelerated it. It is Gentile-Christian conceit that wants to ascribe an exceptional position to itself.

Another thing has been clearly shown to us by the course of this aeon so far. We have already hinted at it. Namely: It cannot have been in the intention of God to let all nations enter the church of the nations on earth during this course of time. It has demonstrably not happened so far. Also, in the

case of vanished nations, it can never be caught up by the most faithful missionary activity on our part. Certainly this gospel of the kingdom should and will be preached among all nations for a testimony, and then the end will come. But this does not mean that many or even all peoples will really receive this gospel in such a way that they will become its bearers and mediators to other peoples, which has actually only been done by a minority of peoples; nor does it mean that the end mentioned there will coincide with the expiration of the time of the Gentiles. Therefore, it is by no means to be proved from the course of history so far that the designation of the "coming in" of the "fullness of the Gentiles" is to be understood in this probably most frequently assumed sense.

Rather, the language of the apostle here compels us to think of a goal of God's ways for this time that is not only willed by God, but also achieved, rounded off, completed. There is nothing in it which, like that first interpretation which we rejected, would remind us of mere patchwork: nor does it wish to harmonize with the second conception, in which either the term "fullness" or "fullness" would have to be considerably degraded, or else the "having entered into" would have to be considerably weakened. If the full weight of the apostolic word is to be preserved unabridged, then something quite different must be meant by the entering in of the fullness of the Gentiles than the very incomplete and quite insufficient way in which the nations have hitherto placed themselves before the Gospel and have processed and expressed it in their popular life. It is true that one is by no means very critical in the application of the predicate "Christian" to nations and governments. We do not wish to examine the extent to which Christian self-deception has assumed even in this. But if for once we may make use of a way of reading and applying the Old Testament, which we do not otherwise approve of, but which is very popular in the circles that like to talk about "Christian" peoples and governments, then it would be quite a long way before any of the historical Christian peoples of this eon would want to fit descriptions like the one in Is. 60, 21: Your people, they will all be righteous. Or Jer. 31, 34: They will all know me, from their least to their greatest. "These are descriptions that are not based on human arbitrariness but on the impulse of the Holy Spirit as a pattern and standard for a real people of God on earth. After that, the common criterion by which the Christianity of the authorities and peoples is measured has had to be significantly modified. In the sheer desperate effort to somehow develop the kingdom of God on earth out of the Christianity of this age, everything is calmly stamped as Christian which only to some extent still adheres to the traditional forms of Christian customs.

We must not speak of such a weakening and emptying of biblical terms when we have to determine what Paul calls the fullness of the Gentiles. We believe that this is the full, unabridged result of the hidden divine activity among the Gentiles during the blindness of Israel. For it is unshakably certain to us that our God, in spite of the thorough fiasco of the Christianity of the nations to even recognize his intentions of grace, let alone to respond to them as far as possible, has nevertheless come to his reckoning also in this age. (I.e. he will not have to record a failure on his part nor to correct an unforeseen failure).

What then was the goal that God set for this eon? Does His Word tell us about it? Most certainly. Paul is precisely the apostle of Christ Jesus to the nations. His activity during his lifetime was fundamental and determining for the course of things during this whole age. His letters to the churches, in spite of all the neologists (who would prefer to deny his authority as to what Christianity actually means), have been proven by the Holy Spirit to this day to be all-encompassing and absolutely authoritative for the living knowledge of the mystery that dominates and encloses this eon. It is the mystery of the body of Christ, the church, which is also called the "fullness of him who fills all in all". Eph. 1, 23. This is what he calls Eph. 3, 2 "the administration of the grace of God", that is, the divine economy of salvation, which is given to me for you (nations). V. 6 he interprets this mystery of Christ to testify that those from the nations are co-heirs, co-incorporated and partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. There is no mention here of world conversion, nor of all nations being subjected to the scepter of Christ in this age. That such an order of salvation will also one day

come with such a goal and outcome is vouched for by Scripture. The fact that people have already set themselves these goals for this eon and are working towards them with great enthusiasm is neither the apostle's nor God's fault. It is just as tragic, because it flowed from exactly the same source as the misunderstanding of Israel, which also did not understand the Messiah in the form of a servant and was annoyed by the crucified until the final rejection. In the same way, the great Christianity of the nations today fails to realize that in this eon it is necessary to suffer, be crucified and die with Christ; a folly for the worshippers of art, aesthetics and culture (i.e. the Greeks) of this age; a nuisance for the "Jews" of Christianity who preach ethics and self-perfection. There one rather enthuses with foreign fire for the conquest of the world for Christ through the gospel and for the penetration of society and state with Christian principles by the people's church. There is enthusiasm for Christian social, commercial and world politics, all things of which there is nothing to be found in the apostle's exposition of his understanding of the administration of the mystery of Christ.

The apostle was allowed to call it a mystery because, according to his own repeated explanation, the guidelines for this new, unprecedented rule of God among the nations were not even recorded in the Old Testament revelation given until then, and thus could not be recognized even by otherwise enlightened, spirit-filled Israelites without new, special instruction and revelation; but as they were obediently acknowledged after such instruction was given. For purely human wisdom, philosophical or theological, this mystery is inconceivable from the beginning 1 Cor. 2.

We have already indicated above in the discussion of v. 11, how God had understood to fill now already soon two millennia with the execution of that great, until then unheard of thought: Out of Israel's fall salvation for the Gentiles! We called this counsel of God the older one, concealed from the prophets of Israel. We would like to illuminate this now more near.

To the attentive searcher in the whole Word, who has an open eye for all the ways of God and to whom no word or deed of God is without meaning, it cannot escape notice that God's covenant with Israel is by no means at the beginning of his saving work with mankind at all. However, Jehovah waits until Moses the Hebrew to state his revelatory truth in writing. For "to them is familiar what God has spoken." But before Abraham and Noah there was an Enoch. And Abraham himself, God's chosen one, has a wonderful mysterious contemporary, a priest-king, not from Israel, to whom Abraham also gave tithes, i.e. whom he recognized as being above him and by whom he allowed himself to be blessed. To this the letter to the Hebrews remarks: Without any contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. And he emphasizes what an immensely high, typical significance the priestly kingship of this Melchizedek has for the Son of God, to whom the latter is compared. Now Jehovah himself, as the covenant God of Israel, has circumscribed the priestly dignity and calling of his chosen people in the most definite way and represented it in the Aaronite priesthood of the house of Levi. That is, Israel's people-priesthood is that of the firstborn son of Jehovah in the family of the nations on earth. "But this one is a priest forever," not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek. This is undoubtedly higher, older, more wonderful, heavenly. It did not flow from Israel, nor was it intended for Israel as a people, much less limited to it. We believe to see in it an intimation of a pre-Mosaic, even pre-Abrahamic, embodiment of the highest conceivable priestly and kingly dignity for the Son of God, organically related to thoughts of God concerning the "sons of God" to be gathered from the nations, non-Israelite humanity. (This intimation was done shadowily and would have remained unrecognizable without later revelation). To carry out and consummate this thought of God, projecting before and above Israel, is, according to Paul's exposition, the mystery of the "administration of God's grace among the nations" of this age, the age of the nations. This congregation, which is to be kept blameless until the day of Jesus Christ, which is to be conformed to the image of the Son, so that he may be the firstborn among many brethren, is promised the highest conceivable organic unity with the transfigured Son of God. He the head, she the body, his own fullness - completion, fulfilled to the whole fullness of God, which dwells in him, the head

completely. A higher sonship cannot possibly exist in the whole divine household. Hence the apostle's bold conclusion: If children, then heirs, God's heirs and co-heirs of Christ Rom. 8, 17. Everything harmonizes and sounds out in the same wonderfully high and noble tone.

That the Holy Spirit will succeed in the calling, gathering and preparation of this congregation, the family of legitimate, spirit-begotten sons of God, to solve the task assigned to him by the Father and the Son and to lead everything out gloriously, is undoubted. It is true that the objection is often raised that those who do not believe in the overcoming of the world through the gospel in this age are thereby attributing a fiasco to the Holy Spirit. But such an accusation is unfounded. For it is not a failure if I do not carry out something that I did not set out to do, regardless of whether others thought it of me. Nowhere in the NT is the conquest of the world, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth envisaged for this eon. Modern theology has completely broken with the eschatology of Jesus and his apostles precisely because it does not want to be used for the advanced conception of the kingdom of God without rape. For us, however, it remains exemplary and authoritative despite all neology. We also do not believe that God intends to carry out his kingdom program in a neological, modernized form.

However, this whole order of salvation is wonderfully wisely designed and intended for the execution of the great mystery "Christ in us, the hope of glory". It was not and still is not the great masses of Christianity who have recognized this and let themselves be taken by it. Such a Gospel is not for the masses. But in all times, even the darkest times, there has been no lack of chosen souls who, in simplicity of faith, have given God justice in His Word, who have received the spirit of sonship and have been sealed for the day of redemption.

How big this full number is, of course, is hidden from us. Also in this the divine wisdom is justified. We have again the same signature of the divine procedure before us, the greatest definiteness on the part of the divine, coupled with absolute inability on our part to make statistics or calendars. The moral freedom and personal responsibility of anyone who does not respect such blessedness is absolutely preserved. But the Lord knows his own. The image of the body, i.e. an organism completed in itself, which is now being prepared for the head as the future organ of execution, which is repeatedly used with great detail in Paul's letters, probably gives us the right key to understanding what is meant by the expression fullness or fullness.

The fact that the same is presented as the fullness of the Gentiles does not mean that Jews are excluded from participation in the mystery of the body of Christ. It should be noted, however, that Paul, the administrator of this mystery, emphasizes again and again that even the Jews are not in Christ Jesus as Jews, i.e., not on the basis of any special privileges that they otherwise unmistakably possess over the Gentiles in the divine administration of other times. In other words, a Jew does not enjoy the least privilege as such, nor does he somehow stand on a different ground in Christ Jesus, i.e. in the community of life of this mystery, than the poorest, sinking Gentile who has become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

It is equally unmistakable that the consuming zeal with which Paul resisted the Jewish Christians of his day to put any Jewish stamp on the believers from the nations or to bring them under Moses sprang precisely from the deep realization that this mystery involved the special thoughts of God with the nations, such as dated far back before Moses and before Abraham but had remained hidden in God throughout the Israelite revelation and covenant period.

And so all Israel will be saved

26. 27 . . . and so shall all Israel be saved, as it is written, Out of Zion shall come the Savior, he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and this is the covenant of me unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

With these words we reach the climax of this prophetic execution. From step to step the outlines became clearer, more definite. Now it lies wonderfully bright before our astonished gaze. All Israel is to be saved. Here we no longer speak of a conditional possibility, nor of a great and ever-increasing probability. The spirit drives the apostle to the positive declaration of a redemptive act of God for all Israel, which is taken into undoubted prospect. Certainly, one can refuse to believe it. God does not force anyone to accept his certain promises without reservation. But let it at least remain true that such is recorded here in unambiguous language. If an earthly monarch has the right to demand: one should not doubt the word of a king, then this applies much more to the promises of the Almighty.

First, let us notice how Paul connects this statement to what has gone before. He says: and so. Previously it was said that Israel's blindness would last "until that". To this a simple "and so" would have sufficed here, and we would have had no occasion to demand more. He would have been justified in the exposition of the temporal limitation of the national blindness of his people. But his eye rested on another great thought of God, for the execution of which the wonderful and hidden God, who is God not only of the Jews but also of the nations, uses the very time during which his people lie under wrath and judgment. The one and the other are interconnected links in a great, mysterious chain of divine decrees that span the ages. There is no mere historical and chronological "and then", but there is a kingdom-organic, consistent "and so". This wants to tell us that there is an inner, essential connection between the different salvation economies, the administrations of God's thoughts with mankind. God is no sooner able (for inner, factual reasons) to turn away from Israel and to the until then backward nations, than until Israel persistently closed itself to him as a people, so that further work, other than by judgment, has become morally impossible. Thus, it is more than a mere external waiting until a certain period of time has elapsed before God can turn again to the judged Israel in indescribable grace. The fullness of the Gentiles must have been received first, so the Gentiles must also have had the opportunity to take a moral stand on the indescribably high offer of true, unabridged filiation to Himself and of fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ, in suffering as well as in glory. It must first have turned out that they themselves, as nations, even as organized Christendom, as called bearers and witnesses of the fullness of the gospel of Christ, were not willing to do right by God. At the same time, under the general unbelief, half-belief, formism and apostasy of the people's church - the body of Christ, the mystery of the church, must be developed and prepared before it can go one epoch-making step further in the great ways of God. That is why the apostle does not merely say "and then", but "and so".

At the same time it is clearly stated that this idea of the salvation of the whole Israel is by no means something new, unforeseen, but it is one of the great, conscious goals of the God of the ages. God Himself has given us such clear visual instruction about this in the beginnings of Israel that misunderstanding is impossible for those who hold on to the typical prophetic character of the great deeds of God in the Old Testament.

Has a nation ever been born like this people? Despite all the threats from Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the despised group grows steadily into a great nation. Its misery increases in the meantime into the unbearable. Then God sends the man who had been among his brethren before, thinking "they would understand that God would give them salvation by his hand; but they did not understand. "Acts 7:25 Jehovah now sends this same Moses to them another time to deliver all Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And what happened? Exodus 4:31: "And the people believed. " To what extent? Scripture elaborates. Moses commands every head of a family in all Israel to slaughter with his own hand the innocent lamb ordained by God, to take its blood and to coat the jambs and thresholds of their door. And all Israel believes it and is obedient to the word of the Lord through

Moses. It seeks and finds cover and safety from the choking angel under the blood of the lamb. Not even one firstborn of Israel is killed. For all Israel believed.

And so it came to pass that all Israel, 600,000 men with a great company all went out of Egypt, and not one claw remained behind. Likewise, a few days later, the whole army of Israel goes dry-footed through the depths of the Red Sea, while the Egyptians, who also tried, drowned, that not even one remained.

If this divine sign language means something, and we hold to that, then it is certain that we can calmly let the word of the apostle stand here unabridged. This is also clearly expressed in the word of Jehovah through Jeremiah (16:14, 15; 23:7), "Behold, days come, saith Jehovah, when it shall no more be said. As Jehovah lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but, As Jehovah lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of the north, and out of all the countries whither he had driven them! I will bring them back to their land, which I gave to their fathers. There is evidently in view a national salvation so much grander and more glorious than that was, that the former, shadowy one is no longer to be thought of. Even if we put the main emphasis here on the incomparably more glorious character of this still future, real, not only shadowy and temporary redemption, it is not acceptable to think of a smaller extent of it than that deliverance from Egypt had.

It is true that we do not know national salvations and conversions up to this day (apart from the shadow image of Israel just considered). Never and nowhere in this eon has a whole city, a whole province, a whole people become believers in Christ. Even the families are rare, in which the word of the cross did not cause a separation between believers and unbelievers. But we have no experiential knowledge of many other manifestations of divine power and glory. But this does not prove anything against a procedure of God in another age. It is very significant that our very Christianity, which so readily applies the predicate "Christian" in sweeping terms and speaks without hesitation of Christian nations in this age, is so skeptical of a word of God that describes a real salvation on a national basis and on a national scale.

But even more serious and far-reaching is another question: Will this national salvation of all Israel, when it occurs, extend only to the generation then living on earth, or will it have retroactive power and significance? That is, will the generations of Israel that died in unbelief and under the judgment of blindness also participate in it?

We are well aware that we are entering an area where special caution and sobriety are needed. At the same time, we have the painful feeling that there is still a great deal of dogmatic and denominational bondage to overcome here. Our entire evangelical theology and interpretation of Scripture is reproached for hardly having given these questions the due care and effort, but above all for not having taken the so necessary lack of presuppositions. The development of biblical eschatology has lagged very much behind. On the other hand, we know ourselves bound in our investigation by nothing but an earnest simple-minded desire to let God, under all circumstances, come into His own in all His works. We have neither a traditional dogmatic position to justify, nor any opposing one to defend.

If the answer we give to the above question does not have the clear word of God for itself, then it must be rejected without fail. But if it has it, then it is not eliminated by opposing it with traditional and prevailing theological opinions.

We believe that the scope of the national salvation of Israel prophesied here, i.e. still future, is not to be limited to the generation living on earth at the time when this Scripture will be fulfilled, but that its extension will stretch back as far as the national judgment of blindness.

First of all, let us realize what the restriction of the divine power of grace to only the one generation presently among the living would imply. It would mean that God applied a completely different standard in the execution of his judgment than in the glorious manifestation of his glorious grace.

His wrath burned unceasingly over all the generations of Israel from the days of the rejected Messiah to those of the returning Messiah. His grace, however, extends only over that small fraction of the whole which enjoys the purely accidental privilege, mediated by nothing, of being born later. This would certainly not look as if in this case mercy could boast against judgment. The question could certainly not be dismissed how God's justice could remain untouched in the case of such a purely arbitrary difference between equally guilty generations of the same people.

But we can get even closer to the matter than by such inferences. We go back to the testimony of Scripture. First, to the context of this whole Pauline treatise. We stay within the framework of this 11th chapter. In verse 12 the apostle introduced us: But if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the nations, how much more their fullness. Was his focus here on the fall and loss of only one, say, the generation of Jews living at the same time as him - or rather on the entire population of the people during the present eon? History and revelation confirm the latter assumption. But who gives us now the right to make such a restriction with the content of the same pronoun - their - in the second member of his sentence, where it is spoken of their full number, that thereby only one, the last living generation should be thought of? A healthy, sober exegesis certainly not. The result would then not be a "full number", i.e. completeness, which the apostle had in mind, but the final result would again be only a small fragment of the whole people, a repeated remnant. With that, however, the whole progress in the apostolic execution would be destroyed. The certainly intended culmination of his argument would be broken off.

The same would follow from verse 15, where also their rejection is contrasted with their acceptance. If their transgression has extended over all generations, with what right do we let their acceptance shrink all at once to one, the last of a long, painful series.

V. 16 speaks even more clearly: But if the firstfruits are holy, so is the mass. The firstfruits were taken from the first generation living at that time on the day of Pentecost. If any generation of Israel was under the full pressure of the divine judgment, it was the one that cried out with its own mouth the presumptuous word: His blood come upon us and upon our children. But if Paul may extend his conclusion to that mass from which the firstfruits were taken, then the principled standpoint we take here is quite warranted. For if what Paul states from that mass is correct, if it is ever to be expressed in the historical experience of that mass, what is preformed and secured by the firstling, then this must lie irrefutably in the future, cannot therefore be called in question by that generation's having died. For during their lifetime, it is obvious, that mass has only experienced the terribly serious reverse side of their being "sanctified", namely being cursed and banished. With this, however, the apostolic promise, which after all is not a threat, cannot possibly be exhausted; for between the firstling and the masses, according to Scripture, there is no exclusionary opposition, but rather a pragmatic connection, which demands and allows to follow for the masses what the firstling has in advance.

Is there any further light from Scripture other than the evidence taken from this context on this point? Indeed. We think of those last words of the Lord Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem, which in the same remarkable way as it happens here, follow the serious judgment with the wonderful pardon and salvation. Mt. 23, 37-39: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to her! How often have I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you have not wanted! Behold, your house shall be left unto you desolate: for I say unto you, Ye shall not see me from henceforth, till ye say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. " The outlines of the fate which the Messiah holds out to his deluded people coincide, turn by turn, with what Paul announces in this whole passage. We will have the opportunity to come back to a main point in it. We ask first: Who did the Lord mean when he said, "your house shall be left unto you desolate, ye shall not see me from henceforth . . ? " Undoubtedly the generation of those days. History has corroborated this. It came to pass according to his word. But

when he now continues to say in the speech before the ears of the hearers: until "you" say: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! - Whom does he mean? Is it really necessary or permissible and compatible with simple exegetical honesty to make the leap all at once from the contemporaries of his appearance at that time, across everything in between, to the generation of the Jews who will be found in the streets of Jerusalem at his return? What sense then can there be in calling out to his contemporaries their judgment in this form, that they should see him no more, with the strange addition: until your descendants say in two thousand years: Blessed is he who comes! If it was a real punishment - and otherwise the words have no sense - that Israel and Jerusalem were not allowed to see their Messiah since those days, then the announcement of the end of this punishment can have meaning only for those who were to be affected by this judgment. Otherwise the announcement would have no sense. For however one may understand the Lord's prophecy of his reappearance for and in Jerusalem, whether as conditioned by Israel's repentance or as effecting it, - this makes no difference to the fact that he clearly foretells to that generation an end of their punishment. But if Jesus knew, and we firmly believe that he knew, that not only that generation but many after them would die over it before his word could be fulfilled, then it was idle and superfluous to speak about it before the ears of those who were not to be touched by it at all. In other words, without the assumption of Jesus that his listeners at that time would really be witnesses of his return and would then speak in such a way as he put into their mouths, the stain of the inapplicable, if not of the inconsistent, sticks to his speech.

But that this prerequisite was undoubtedly alive and prophetically present with him, testifies us the revelation that God gave him to show his servants what must soon happen. There we read right at the beginning (1, 7): Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, even they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of him. Yes, amen.

There it is expressed with clear words that the contemporaries of that time will see him and participate in the national lamentation. If it is objected here that the word refers to the final judgment and the lamentation is caused by the despair of the irredeemably lost who have pierced him, we reject this objection decisively on the basis of the Scriptures. If it were justified, then it would have to be said that they will lament because of them, i.e. because of their ruin. But it is a completely groundless and downright outrageous assumption to stamp all tribes of the land of Israel (let alone, according to the other possible translation, all families of the earth) as irredeemably lost when Jesus comes again. Rather, every simple-minded reader of the Word of God can be completely convinced by comparing this passage with Zech. 12, 10-14, that only the main features of what the prophet describes there in detail are reproduced and summarized here

We believe that endless confusion in all biblical doctrines has arisen primarily because, for some dogmatic or other consideration, without any inner necessity founded in the word itself, one has allowed oneself to add the simple grammatical sense of the word and to introduce a regular bartering of terms, which, of course, once opened, must always be pursued more vigorously.

It is not our task nor our intention to trace in this treatise the lines to their exits which have opened up in our view of the great future of Israel. We could not and could not avoid the question that has been repeatedly put to us verbally. If we have succeeded in stimulating further, fuller research into the words of prophecy by what we are convinced we have said here in accordance with the words of Scripture, that is enough. One thing, however, must have become clear to every impartial reader who has followed us up to this point, that this question of the Jews does not belong, in terms of its scope and significance, to a theological cabinet of curiosities. In it and with it are interwoven and interwoven the highest and most formidable problems that have ever occupied God and man. Israel's central position in the whole divine household with the world emerges ever more sharply and powerfully. It is not by chance that more than two thirds of the whole Bible deals with Israel. The Holy Spirit has not been guilty of any one-sidedness or exaggeration in this. But we must go further.

We have another shining word to consider in this connection. It is the justification from Scripture for the great announcement that all Israel shall be saved. "Out of Zion shall come the Savior, he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: and this is the covenant of me unto them, when I shall take away their sins. " With the purely text-critical question, how this however strange summary of several Old Testament prophecies might have originated, we do not want to dwell. That is not within the scope of our task. We only refer to the passages that Paul combines in a peculiar way through the Spirit. There are Isa. 27, 9; 59, 20 to be compared with Jer. 31, 33 and with Ps. 110, 2; Ps. 2, 6. We take the text as we find it. We are already partly prepared for what he tells us. He proclaims in clear language the great saving mission of the returning Messiah to His people, the house of Israel.

The name Jacob should again be a sufficient guarantee that here only the natural, carnal descendants of the patriarch were to be thought of, not a "spiritual", New Testament Israel.

That furthermore only the still future return of the Lord can be thought of here should likewise need no special proof. At his first appearance Israel had fallen. Like their fathers with Moses, also the Jews, among whom Jesus appeared, had not understood "that God had sent them salvation by his hand". They pushed him away. So now, as with Moses, the Messiah must appear another time before his brothers believe in him. How could the apostle, who wrote these words a full human age after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, have wanted to refer this to his first appearance. His gaze does not rest at all on what lies behind, but on what lies gloriously in the future. So also the designation "from Zion" does not want to harmonize with the whole character of the first coming of the Messiah among his people. This happened from Bethlehem, from Nazareth, i.e. from poverty, weakness and lowliness to suffering, rejection and death. The future one happens from Zion, the throne seat of the Davidic ruling house. No matter whether one attaches a supernatural meaning to the word Zion here, or whether one understands it simply as a symbol of royal display of power, the contrast remains the same.

But there is an objection to the fact that the return of the Lord is supposed to mean redemption for the whole house of Jacob! How does this rhyme, one asks anxiously, with the almost generally prevailing view that with the future of the Lord the general judgment of the world begins and then immediately the eternal fate of all men without distinction will be irretrievably decided? Of course, we do not believe that such a view is correct either. But we also consider such a view to be quite inconsistent and untenable. However, we are not dealing here with the removal of medieval theological rubble. We do not let our view be clouded or diverted by the sunny explanation of the apostle and all the rest of Scripture that the return of the once rejected Messiah means salvation and redemption for the same Israel that did not want him then and has not wanted him since. We do not owe that view any thanks or consideration. It has long enough contributed its share to spoil, even to darken, Christianity's joyful expectation of the coming Lord. For too long the same Christianity, which was called to put this blessed hope brightly on the lampstand, especially towards Israel, has been tempted to ridicule the Jew who is still waiting for his Savior-Messiah. Poor, "blind" Jew! You see better than the "seeing" Christianity. You only continue to wait for him who is to come. You are right after all! For he will come who is to come, even though you do not know who he is who will then appear to you, a Savior and a Redeemer - your Redeemer.

But how can we explain that the sight of Christ returning in glory should have saving and converting power? Does this not contradict all experience and all doctrine? Neither the one nor the other. It may well not correspond to our experience. But is it necessary? Is God in his saving work for all ages bound to our experience? Can he take no other path than the one we know? It is certain that there is salvation in no other, nor is there any other name under heaven given to men in which they may be saved. But is there any question of sending for another Savior? Do we want God to never make use of the fullness dwelling in Christ in any other way than according to the orthodox method we are accustomed to? Moreover, it does not contradict all experience. For example, the man who

wrote this also had an experience. He saw the transfigured Christ in person on the road to Damascus, and he saw Him to salvation and to the glorious calling to an unsurpassed, fruitful and blessed ministry. What significance Paul attaches, especially to the present question of Israel's national salvation, to his encounter with the Lord of glory, we have been permitted to see in our consideration of v. 1. Any objection to Paul's experience that is based only on our own experience must be silenced. It is shown conclusively that the visible appearance of the Lord in glory can and will serve high and glorious purposes of salvation with mankind.

This finds a very remarkable confirmation by the procedure of the risen Lord with his disciple Thomas. The latter resolutely refuses to believe the mere testimony of his fellow disciples to the Lord's resurrection. He insists that he must first have sensuous proof of the reality of the bodily resurrection of the Crucified One. In this, Thomas is a true type of his foolishly deluded people, who are not amenable to mere testimony. And what happens? Thomas is not rejected or condemned, for eight days later the Risen One Himself approaches him and says, "Reach out your hand, your finger . . and be not faithless, but believing. There Thomas breaks down with the blessed confession: My Lord and my God. However, he must be admonished by the Lord: You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe. But one must not give the sense to these words of the Lord as if those who believe only when they see are therefore damned or irredeemably lost.

Still less does it contradict all doctrine. For it is the clear teaching of this and many other words of the Holy Scripture. Whether it can be inserted into our human doctrinal system without difficulty is, of course, a question. Whoever succeeds in doing so may be glad of it. But this does not make the truth more credible. Where it does not succeed - too bad for the system. It is thereby judged. Such considerations cannot prevent us from accepting the clearly recognized Word and rejoicing in its light and its divine power. We only briefly point out once again the wealth of concordant scriptural testimonies, which all show the same thing, namely, that the return of the Messiah to his people will be the signal and the cause of their national conversion and salvation.

The Old Testament types and models are so numerous that we can only briefly sketch a few. There is a simple, easily comprehensible basic feature running through all of them. It is that God in all his work and activity always comes to his purpose and goal only at the second time. Not the first creation, but only the second will stand. Not the first, but the "other" Adam is the true head of a God-embodied humanity. Not the first son of man, Cain, who was born of the woman, but the "other" one crushes the head of the serpent and is the prince of life.

So it goes also through the whole Israelitish people history. Not the first time, but the second time, Joseph makes himself known to his brothers and thus becomes the savior of the entire house of Jacob. Similarly, Moses, who was ordained by God, is not recognized by his brothers the first time. The second time, however, he leads the people out of Egypt, as we have already seen. That this mission of the once rejected Moses, which brings salvation for the whole people, forms a complete parallel to what the second experience of the once misjudged Messiah will mean for the same people, is certain from the circumstance that Moses' second coming meant the breaking in of divine judgments over the anti-Semitic world empire of Egypt. The inquiring reader will not find it difficult to add significantly to this series of illustrative scriptural types.

These typical presentations of the truth of the salvific significance of the appearance of the Messiah among his people for the second time are followed by the specific prophetic statements of Zechariah, the Lord Jesus himself and the seer of Revelation. There are not many doctrines for which richer and fuller evidence can be found in the Scriptures than for the truth that Jesus will appear the second time to those who wait for him for salvation. The fact that the waiting Israel still does not know for whom it waits has just as little meaning as it had that Joseph's brothers did not recognize him, whose power and greatness they had seen with their eyes, just as Israel had seen for centuries

that of their great brother Jesus. Deeply shameful, however, for Christendom, which prides itself on knowing the one on whose future its true hope stands, remains the poignant, silent testimony of a Jewry blindly but persistently waiting for the Messiah. They will not be put to shame even in their waiting.

"And this is the covenant for them from me, when I shall take away their sins. "That this is not, like the covenant of Sinai, a covenant of works and performances, but like the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a covenant of free, gracious, unconditional promises, needs no proof. Under that covenant Israel should and had to fall, even if it does not want to admit its bankruptcy until today. However, this covenant is not something that Israel has to do or fulfill. It is the Lord alone who promised to take away their sins, the sin of the whole land Zech. 3,9, the sin of the whole people Isa. 33, 24, all their sins and impurities Jer. 31, 34; Ez. 36, 25. 29. 33; Micah 7, 19. And why will the Lord do this to Israel? He says through the prophet: "Not for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations where you have come Ezk 36:22, 32. Why then was His name called Jesus before He was born? Because he would redeem his people from all their sins, as it is written in Ps. 130, 8 and Mt. 1, 21. But this has not happened until this day. But the honor of His name demands the fulfillment of this promise according to the whole scope of the great word. It is a sad dishonor to His holy name to say: Well, even if it has not happened to the Jewish people, it is happening to us who are Christians, i.e. the true Israel! Even if Christianity would be saved to the last man, and all Israel would remain unredeemed, this would not make the promise come true, it would remain a stain on his name. It is a disgrace that in wide circles of Christianity one has almost lost the understanding for such an alarming shift of simple moral concepts. If God makes a promise to Israel that is not tied to any condition at all, and it should be considered the fulfillment of this promise that the people to whom it was made have nothing at all from it, but a completely different body and class of people, then for simple people who are not at home in theological arts, the unconditional reliability of the Word of God is over. They will have a heavy responsibility who have so loosely dealt with the unbreakable promises of the holy and true. What Jesus may have thought when he taught his disciples to pray: Let thy name be hallowed. Certainly nothing else than what he himself had recognized and grasped from all the writings of the prophets as the great proof of the sanctity of the name of Jehovah, i.e. to fulfill his word, to keep his oath and not to lack anything of all that he promised his people. That his disciples should ever do such bartering with biblical names and impute to his Father completely different recipients of the promises than the original addressees was certainly not his intention. But it is thankfully impossible that his promises would not be fulfilled. Paul already said v. 6: But if it is by grace, then no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. This comes out with great clarity in Ezek. 36, where we find one of the most comprehensive promises of this dispensation of God's grace to Israel. In verse 24, the Lord says that He will take His people from the nations and gather them from all lands and bring them into their own land - which neither they themselves nor anyone else would be able to do. And then comes the magnificent announcement of what Jehovah will do for them and to them. Ten times it says: I will, I will! Not once: You shall! It is all done out of free, unfathomable love, out of holy zeal for the glory of his name before the nations. Then only, after the cleansing and pardon has taken place, the fruit and effect of such overwhelming, unheard-of grace takes place v. 31: "And you will remember your evil ways and your actions that were not good, and will feel disgust at yourselves because of your iniquities and your abominations. The repentance and contrition is not absent, but it is not set as a condition, but as a delicious result of such love and grace.

Before we move on to the next verse, we would like to elaborate on two points that we have only touched on above. We want to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings. The first point concerns the character of Christ's future. In the confession and expectation of all Christianity, he acts only as the executor of judgment, as it is expressed in the Creed: . . from then on he will come to judge the living and the dead. We may have given the impression to some readers by what we have said above

that we want to deny this. That is not our intention. Rather, the pages of this booklet are our witnesses to the effort we have made to show Christianity the full seriousness of the great crisis it is facing, which will culminate in and be carried out in the near future of our Lord. To this end, we again recall the Old Testament parallel: The second coming of Moses meant terrible judgment for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but redemption for the Lord's people. As it says in Isa. 1, 27: Zion will be redeemed through judgment. And Hosea 2, 21 (19): I will betroth you to me in righteousness and judgment. We also remember the change of the ages: when in 70 A.D. the crushing judgment of Jehovah reached his city, people and land, at the same time a new time of salvation and grace dawned for us, the nations. "Their fall the nations salvation. " These facts are familiar enough to us, after all. The same principle will find its application in the next coming change of the ages. Over the glorious, apostate nations-Christianity-will be poured out the bowls of God's wrath clearly announced in Revelation. But on Israel will be fulfilled what is said in Isa. 40, 2: Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her that her travail is finished, that she has received from the hand of Jehovah double for all her sins.

The judges, those Old Testament models of the coming judge, were already avengers and executors of punishments against the enemies of Jehovah and his people, but at the same time "saviors" who saved Israel and set it right Neh. 9, 27.

The other point concerns the character of the salvation prophesied for Israel on a national scale. The thought may easily arise that it would amount to a questionable partiality of God for Israel, if he finally saved this people after thousands of years of disobedience, and that to an extent, which is unattained in the remaining divine salvation. The corrective for this misinterpretation lies in the fact that in the traditional view of the future lot of mankind no other distinction has been taught to be made than between eternally blessed or eternally lost. Those who, according to the popular conception, "go to heaven" enjoy all imaginable bliss there. Who "goes to hell" - all imaginable torment. That there is a moment of truth in this, we do not deny at all. But one has hardly begun to realize that there are quite enormous distances on the ground of being saved. The so popular and considered so pious little wall saying "Only blessed! "is the sad product of this Christian short-sightedness. Just compare, for example, an Enoch and a Noah. The former as a type of those who are taken away before the coming of the judgment, thus do not come into the judgment at all; the latter just as clearly as a type of those who are preserved and saved through severe judgments. Or an Abraham and a Lot. The latter certainly did not perish in the ruin of Sodom, any more than Abraham. He was undoubtedly a righteous soul and was saved. But how? And what was the result of his life? Esau gave away his firstborn, but that he was cursed or rejected by his father because of it is nowhere said. The NT speaks the same language, without shadowy images. Thus 1 Cor. 3, 15 speaks of those whose life's work and fruit of the ministry (wood, hay, stubble) is consumed by the fire of judgment, while they themselves are saved, as through the fire. A similar result comes from the image of the race in the racetrack, where all run but only one receives the prize. 1Co 9:24-27 What about those who do not receive the prize? They are not killed, but neither are they crowned. So there is a loss of the crown, but not of life. Exactly on the same line Paul moves 1 Cor. 15, 40. 41, where the resurrection bodies of the righteous (because only their resurrection is mentioned there) are stated to have the greatest differences, in which of course the same differences are reflected in the degree of glory of those concerned.

In that context we find the key to understanding this question of the relative importance of the redemption of Israel as a people versus the glory lot destined for the church of God in Christ Jesus. It says v. 40: They are heavenly bodies, and they are earthly bodies. Now, according to Scripture, the church of Jesus Christ, consisting of Jews and Gentiles who have believed and are perfected in faith without looking, is a thoroughly heavenly body, the result of a heavenly calling, with a heavenly citizenship, with heavenly promises and duties. Israel, on the other hand, will inherit the promised land, possess the earth eternally, be the people of divine planting on this earth, center and starting

point for all distant, kingdom-historical processes among mankind, organ for the execution of its world-historical goals here.

Where these biblical distinctions are held, the word of truth is "rightly divided," and the one is well joined to the other. But where, for example, it is thought, as is almost universally taught, that Israel's salvation has as its goal its corporate incorporation into the church and its equality with the members of the body of Christ, then of course one does not see through it, but must get into confusion. Out of this confusion nothing else helps than a sad shift of concepts one after the other. Either Israel must be "spiritualized", or the goal and calling of the church is Judaized, - or both. Confusion in any case.

If the order here is correct, then the mystery of the body is already completed before the resumption of the official theocratic relations of the Messiah with his people can take place, which have as their next goal the salvation of all Israel. So there is no question of Israel being incorporated into the Body of Christ, i.e. into the community of those who will be conformed to the image of His Son. But all Israel is saved, but on a completely different level than the congregation. It gets neither a heavenly inheritance (instead of the promised land of Canaan) nor a place among those who will inherit the sonship and the glory connected with it. This is a destiny that God has not intended and promised to those who see, but only to those who overcome through faith.

Enemies and yet lovers

V. 28 In regard to the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but in regard to election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

From the whole context of the apostle's explanation so far it follows that both relations, enemies as well as beloved, are to be taken only as an expression of the divine attitude towards Israel. But not that Israel's enmity against the church or vice versa is mentioned, nor that the apostle's enmity against his people is mentioned. The mutual additions "for your sake" and "for the sake of the fathers" make this clear. The former clearly reflects what Paul had already presented to us earlier as the motivation for God's strangely severe procedure with the people of his choice (cf. vv. 11, 12, 15). We saw what was involved in the divine plan of the ages. The time had come to complete the mystery of the Christ. He Himself, the only begotten of the Father, had accomplished the work He was to do. He had ascended above all the heavens and entered into the glory of the eternal Father. Before he would return to earth, take the throne of his father David, take the theocratic rule over the whole house of Israel and prepare a willing people for him as subjects and servants, he himself should first receive a "fullness", a completion, as a head has it in his body Eph. 1, 23. God had not given this secret to Israel to administer from the ages, but kept it hidden Rom. 15, 25; Col. 1, 26. For on the ground of this wonderful relationship Israel's special position and privilege counted for nothing. Soon enough it turned out that Israel was by no means willing to submit to this new order in the divine household. Not only did they themselves, like their fathers, always resist the Holy Spirit, but the appearance to the nations of the apostle of Christ Jesus, who came from among them, and who had to administer this mystery of our participation in the glory of Christ, aroused their envy and bitterest hostility. Thus was fulfilled, and it had to be fulfilled according to inner laws, what is written in Is. 63, 10: "Then he turned himself into an enemy to them: he himself fought against them. " And since those days it has now gone on for almost two millennia, as the Lord let proclaim through Jer. 30, 14: "I have smitten thee with the stroke of an enemy, with cruel chastening. " And in addition Klagl. 2, 5: The Lord has become like an enemy, he has destroyed Israel, destroyed all her palaces, destroyed her strongholds.

Paul says: "For your sake! "This is how far God has gone with the chosen people, descending to such depths of pain and chastisement with them, in order to be able to freely and unhindered lead out

his wonderful counsel with the nations fullness. The hardening of His proprietary people has been the price it has cost Him "for our sakes." Oh what depths of suffering Christ had for His body, the church! Col. 1, 24. For not coldly and without feeling did Israel's God let His people be pressed, tormented and trampled underfoot by their enemies. "He who touches them touches the apple of his eye " Zech. 2, 12 (8). And the day of visitation upon the proud, secure nations, who helped to ruin, since God was only a little angry, will come. "Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured, and all thy oppressors shall go into captivity altogether, and thy robbers shall become a spoil, and all thy plunderers will I give to plunder" Jer, 30, 16.

With what devastating force will this "for your sake" one day raise its accusation against an enlightened and well-instructed Christianity, which nevertheless knew how to pass by the people beaten by God with a shake of the head and to say: "There! There! Is the Lord's people, who had to go out of their country. "(Ezek. 36, 20 Luther)

"Concerning the selection, however, beloved, for the sake of the fathers. "This is the other side of the same thing. From that "for your sakes" it became clear to us why God had to take such terribly serious measures with Israel, since she would otherwise have resisted at every turn the execution of the wonderful counsel with the nations fullness. From this "for the sake of the fathers" it shines out just as brightly why there can never be an abandonment of the divine thoughts of love with his people. They are and remain "beloved ones". This is the inexhaustible spring from which the prophets have drawn, on the one hand, their most poignant laments, but also their richest promises of future redemption and reacceptance. It is the theme for the wonderful symphony of prophecies of a golden happy age, a kingdom of peace and righteousness for the redeemed of Zion, which will resound through the millennia and must never cease until the spirit of prophecy - the testimony of Jesus - shall have come to rest in the glorious city of God.

Under the selection we do not have to think here of the remnant according to the election of grace, which was spoken of in verse 2-5. For the spirit is obviously no longer occupied with that phase of this great question, the view is not led back from the whole people, at which the prophetic representation has arrived here, to that fraction. But by selection is to be understood here only the plan of our God, which is unfathomable to our thinking, which encompasses all things, also the results of whole ages, and directs them according to the counsel of his will. In the mere consideration of the selection as an abstract concept, however, nothing comes out for us but fatigue of the spirit. Therefore also here the redeeming addition follows immediately: "for the sake of the fathers". With this, we are again placed on the ground of concrete facts and life-filled divine instructions.

When Jehovah entrusted Moses, once not understood by Israel, from the fiery bush on Mount Horeb with the mission of salvation to his afflicted people, it was with reference to his own character as the God of the "fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob". We saw what God wanted to show us with that all-embracing salvation of His people for their future. We have also already pointed out the obvious fact that neither the Mosaic Law nor the Levitical sacrificial service can be called in any way fundamental or merely contributory to Israel's national salvation from Egypt - a fact the scope of which Israel itself blindly passed by from the beginning. What great things happened to Israel at that time, happened for the sake of the fathers. For Exodus 2:24, 25 says: "And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and God saw the children of Israel and was concerned about them. (Cf. 2 Kings 13:23: 1 Chron 16:15-17). It is the same point of view that the prophet takes at the conclusion of a great message of redemption: He will have mercy on us again, will trample down our iniquities, and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. You will show truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham, which you swore to our fathers from the days of old Micah 7, 20. In the same light, the Holy Spirit, on the threshold of the new, messianic time, puts the things that happened. Thus Mary lifts up the Lord, who took upon Himself Israel His servant, that He might be mindful of the mercy (as He spoke to our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed

forever Luk 1, 54. And Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesies and says: "The Lord, the God of Israel, has visited and redeemed His people . . to perform mercy on our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to Abraham our father Luk. 1, 68-73. Again and again we encounter this reference to the promises, the covenant, the oath with the fathers at the turning points of Israel's history. Is it now a purely ideal, academic interest that the fathers have in the faithful fulfillment of these divine promises? Or is nothing more said with the reference to the fathers than that God cannot become oath-breaking? Certainly that is said with. But there must be something beyond that, otherwise the simple reference to the honor of the divine name would be sufficient to express it. But it is said here quite definitely: "for the sake of the fathers". Now from the parallel expression: "for your sakes" in the preceding clause it very clearly appears that God treated his beloved people as enemies, because it was a question of carrying out certain great plans with us nations, in which, by faith, we have not only an ideal but a very direct, real interest. Is it not the natural thing then to give the same interpretation to the expression "for the sake of the fathers," to make the same application? We think so. This leads us to the same point of aim to which our eye was directed above already in considering verse 26, when we recognized that the final exhaustive execution of the national promises to Israel could not possibly be conceived otherwise than by drawing also the generations already dead into the sphere of the same. That this is definitely presupposed in relation to the fathers in Scripture is evident from the following.

When Stephen, the man full of faith and spirit, addressed that last, mighty speech to the high council of his people, which is recorded for us in Acts 7, the Spirit clearly leads him to this very point: "And God gave Abraham no inheritance in it, not even a foot wide. And he promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he had no child. " Here it is stated in clear words that Abraham did not experience a personal, real fulfillment of the promise of the possession of this land during his lifetime. This is confirmed by Heb. 11, 9, where it is said of Abraham that he "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, joint heirs of the same promise. "His purchase of a field for the burial of his wife serves to further substantiate that he was a stranger in the Promised Land. It is impossible to doubt the fact that God did not fulfill the promise to Abraham, which was definitely made in person, to give him that land, until this day, according to its simple wording. Why then does Stephen, through the Spirit, cite this undeniable non-fulfillment of a divine promise? Is it done to invalidate the word of God? Does he want to convict his God and the God of his fathers of breaking the word? Nevermore! At that time theological tricks, with which one assigns e.g. to Abraham a special place of honor in heaven as compensation for damages and then renounces in his name without further ado a literal, historical fulfillment of that God's promise, were not yet invented and put into circulation. Whoever reads Acts 7 in context, will easily find in it the same simple basic idea that we described above as dominating all divine activity and work, namely that God always wants to and will reach his actual goal only at the next time, i.e. through resurrection. So also here. God does not need our embarrassed makeshifts to compensate the fathers with something completely different and to quietly give away the simple real fulfillment of the unambiguous promise sworn by an oath. For he has raised from the dead his Son Jesus, the Son of Abraham, the heir of David, and has thus infallibly placed all his promises of God within the realm of finite, consummate fulfillment and execution. The Son of God Himself pointed out this truth clearly and powerfully when He answered the Sadducees of His day: "But that the dead rise, Moses also intimated in the thorn-bush when he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not God of the dead, but of the living, because for Him all live Lk. 20, 37. 38 (and parallels). So here we are not talking about life in the so-called intermediate state, but the Master points us in the most definite way to the area of resurrection for the fulfillment of God's thoughts with the fathers. How real and literal the fathers themselves understood this matter through the spirit that was in them is shown to us by their definite instructions concerning their burial in the promised land. Cf. Gen. 25, 10; 49, 29-32; 50, 24.25; Ex. 13, 19; Jos. 24, 32; Hebr. 11,

22. One may, in supposedly superior spirituality, smile at these burial instructions of the fathers and consider them meaningless, because after all, as one thinks, the whole fulfillment of God's promise must be transferred "to heaven"; but an honest interpretation of Scripture must acknowledge that these fathers had other views about this. If the Epistle to the Hebrews is right, then they commanded such by faith, that is, on the basis of divine revelation, which is always the presupposition and material of true faith. Who will be right in the end, those simple-minded fathers who took God's word at face value, or our spiritualizing interpreters of the Scriptures, the future will teach. For the time being, we consider it safest and most honoring to God that no other meaning be attached to his words than that which they have everywhere in the language and for the understanding of the simple layman.

Thus, this apostolic word of election for the sake of the fathers gains for us a wonderfully far-reaching, comprehensive meaning. It reaches back into the hidden depths of God's eternal thoughts and reaches out into the great day when God will be faithful to the fathers, and for their sake to their seed, to all his beloved people, and fulfill all that he has spoken to them through the mouth of his prophets from of old.

God's gifts of grace and calling irrevocably

V. 29: For the gifts of grace and the calling of God are incalculable.

Obviously, these words are meant to substantiate what the apostle has just told us great things about Israel's re-grafting into its own olive tree, about its national redemption and reuse in the divine kingdom household. All this is based, in the last analysis, on the plan and purpose clearly conscious to God from the beginning, and steadily pursued by Him, with this people of His choosing. It is essentially the same argument that Paul uses right at the beginning of this chapter (v. 2): "God has not cast away his people whom he knew beforehand". Only here he emphasizes not only the principled, but the practical side of the fact. God has purposefully given this people a special calling and special gifts of grace. Is God in this like the man who began to build a tower, laid the foundation, and could not lead it out? Does he have to take back the calling or give it to others? Does he have to suspend the gifts of grace? Has God been forced by the complete fiasco of His chosen people so far to abandon His original purpose? Does he even have to move its execution away from earth to heaven, where bad people and devils can no longer spoil it for him? We have already seen above how thoroughly Paul clears up such foolish ideas.

But it is no idle repetition when he emphasizes in a special way the irrevocability of the "calling and gifts of grace" that God has given to this people. Before we examine what is meant by this calling, we do well to keep two things in mind. First, that in this whole context there is no mention of the conditions of salvation, that is, of the calling to salvation in Christ, as it is given through the Gospel in this age to all men without distinction. Nor of gifts of grace (charismata) in the narrower sense, as Paul writes of them to the churches and how they are worked and distributed by the Spirit in the church. Israel as a people does not stand on church ground, but forms a special economy of God for you.

Second, that this is also not a matter of personal or individual vocation or equipment, but of national and corporate. If we lose sight of these two facts, we lose clarity of vision and are in danger of either excluding what belongs here or including what does not belong here. Both are disturbing and confusing.

For the correct answer to the question about the extent and content of this irrevocable calling and gifts of grace, this epistle itself provides us with the surest clue and support.

Paul had already found reason to ask in ch. 3, 1.2: "What then is the advantage of the Jews? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Much, in every way. For first of all the sayings of God have been entrusted to them. "

How irrevocable this very gift of grace is, with which God entrusts the people of Israel, he himself has clearly shown by two great facts. First, in the writing of the books and letters of the New Testament. This happened (with only one possible exception, that of Luke; and he was undoubtedly, although born Gentile, a proselyte of Judaism before his following of Jesus) by Jewish men only. This cannot find its explanation in the fact that in the first century there was a lack of sufficiently qualified and theological Gentile Christians, that therefore God was of necessity limited to Jews. Such an assumption has no basis whatsoever. Moreover, in the case of Galilean fishermen, as Peter and John were, neither their high natural disposition nor their theological training was the decisive factor. The Holy Spirit can also use theologically educated men, thank God. But he is by no means bound to natural aptitude or school equipment for the communication of his revelations.

The other fact, even more serious than the first, is that the mystery of the Gentiles' participation in and inheritance of the fullness of life and glory in Christ Jesus is given by God to a man who can say of himself: "I am also an Israelite! "His Jewish national consciousness is no less intense than that of the other apostles.

Both facts present themselves before our eyes just for and during an age in which Israel's national existence is suspended and God has no salvation-historical use for His people. In the building up of the church Israel enjoys absolutely no privilege. The believing Jew has nothing ahead of the believing Gentile in Christ. Likewise, the people of revelation in this time of salvation lie fallow and idle, limited to themselves, blinded, broken out, unfruitful for the world of nations. Nevertheless, the men whom God uses for this whole eon as the only authoritative teachers and administrators of his secrets to the nations are from Israel. God could not show more clearly how irrevocable his "calling and gifts of grace" were to Israel. (We do not think it is too much to say for the one who gives these facts their due when we conclude: If it were true, what one wants to make plausible to us with great effort of erudition, that the New Testament people-Christian church is the real kingdom of God on earth, the historical heiress and fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom prophecy, the true spiritual Israel-then the undeniable exclusiveness of God in the use of Jews for the mediation of all, especially the great church revelation would be simply inconsistent and incomprehensible. It would be necessary that the very man who had to reveal and administer this reorganization of things should have been a non-Israelite. Thus that theory, which has caused so much confusion, would have a firm base. For it owes its whole existence only to the endeavor to create way out and remedy for the alleged final fiasco of Jehovah with Israel).

Now it is again clear from the immediate context that Paul in this verse has by no means directed the view only to that "remnant" mentioned in the beginning of his treatise. He obviously wants to say more than only that God has used only this believing remnant of his people in this age for the mediation of his New Testament revelation to the world of nations. Rather, that one is for him only a sample and guarantee for a far greater one - as he expressed it in the word of the firstfruits and the masses in verse 16. The frame, in which Paul grasps this picture, encloses quite logically from the context the whole, saved, blessed Israel. We are looking ahead to an age when not individuals from Israel - as has always been the case - but the whole people will be the bearers and channels of indescribable blessing and salvation for the rest of the human world on earth. A time as Zechariah (8, 13 and 23) foresees: "And it shall come to pass, as you, house of Judah and house of Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. - Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men of all the tongues of the nations shall take hold, yea, they shall take hold of the coattails of a Jewish man, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. " Can one honestly doubt here whether God will give the same extension to the promised

blessing, which is to go from the whole house of Israel over the nations, as to the curse, which has become undeniably historical? This is nothing other than what Paul meant v. 12 when he speaks, "But if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the nations, how much more their fullness! "

There is no need for Paul to give us further information about the extent and expansion of Israel's calling and gifts of grace. That they were and remained the exclusive mediators of all God's revelation to the rest of mankind, despite their national rejection, is probably the first and fundamental one. With it all the rest is given in principle. But not everything is said with it. On an earlier occasion in this letter, the apostle gives us more detailed information about this. He writes ch. 9, 4: "which are Israelites, whose is the adoption as sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the legislation, and the (God's) service, and the promises. " We see at first glance how necessary is our defense against lumping together things that do not belong together. The assumption that Paul here wants to grant the Jewish people a constitutional right to "sonship" in the sense of Rom. 8 and other passages would bring him into contradiction with the testimony of the Lord Jesus as well as with his own preaching. If no definite distinction is made here between two kinds of sonship - the one national, the other quite individual; the one quite unconditional, by virtue of divine calling, the other conditional on faith, i.e. by personal appropriation of the grace offered, the one quite earthly calculated and predisposed for the career on earth, the other wholly heavenly, aiming at participation in the divine nature, at likeness to the dear Son; - then the door is opened for endless confusion. And as with sonship, so with all six pieces. They all do not belong to the inventory of the community economy, but to that of the Israelite national economy.

The "sonship" is the same of which Moses (II. 4, 22) reports for the first time at Jehovah's command to Pharaoh: "My son, my firstborn is Israel. "And of which the prophets speak: "Out of Egypt I have called my son (Hos. 11, 1). And Jer. 31, 9: For I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. "

The "glory" is the same that shone before the newborn people in the pillar of cloud and fire, covering and shielding itself between Israel and the Lord of Pharaoh; that appeared on Sinai; that filled the tabernacle of the testimony and later the temple; that demonstratively leaves the city and the sanctuary at the breaking off of Jehovah's official theocratic relations with his people (Ezek. 11, 22; 23); but which, according to Isa. 4, 5.6, the Lord will again "create over every dwelling place of Mount Zion and over its assemblies, in the day when he shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and swept away the blood debts of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of destruction. "

The "covenants" have nothing in common with that imperfect covenant of Sinai, introduced only temporarily for pedagogical purposes, which was based on obedient fulfillment of the law and therefore could never be kept; but they are those with the fathers, which God Himself established between Himself and them in unconditional, free promises, to which He bound Himself with an oath, but which were made dependent on no man's conduct. These, according to Scripture, include the following: I. With Abraham: a) Possession of the Promised Land. "Unto thy seed will I give this land, from the river of Egypt even unto the river Phrates. " Genesis 15:18. b) Great descendants: "I will multiply you greatly, greatly; you will become the father of a multitude of nations. " Gen. 17:2, 4. Jehovah sets circumcision as a sign of this covenant (vv. 10, 11). Hence Paul speaks Rom. 15, 8: "That Jesus Christ became a minister of circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promise of the fathers. " We still consider this motive sufficient today to justify the faithful retention of circumcision, which is older than Moses, among all Israelites who believe in Christ.

In addition, II. Jehovah's covenant with David, his servant: The theocratic kingship Ps. 89, 3. 4: "Until eternity I will establish your seed and build your throne for all generations. " Here, of course, there is as little mention of a reign in heaven as there is with Abraham of heavenly land ownership. But in

these covenants, both confirmed by the oath of Jehovah, the basic lines of the theocratic relationship are given, which God himself has entered into with the natural people Israel on this earth out of his own free determination.

With the "legislation" we have to think likewise not only of Sinai, although what happened there is typical for what still lies in the future. The expression "legislation" includes more than the law given at that time, which was put in commandments. It rather emphasizes the fact that it belongs to the special peculiarities of the Israelite people that their legislation for family, cultus and state is not of human but directly divine origin. Ps. 147, 19.20: He proclaims his word to Jacob, his statutes and rights to Israel. To no nation has he done thus. And Moses may admonish the people: What great nation is there that would have such righteous statutes and judgments as all this law that I set before you today. (Deut. 4:8; vv. 33, 34; 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chr. 17:21, 22) This is what is unique about the reign of God, this kingdom of God on earth, that He Himself, the great God from heaven, undertakes to be lawgiver, judge and king, not to the mighty and glorious above, but to a mortal nation of sinful children of men. It is a complete misunderstanding of the situation, if one does not know how to make anything out of all these great events in the history of the world and the empire, but only edifying applications for the spiritual life, whereby the final completion of the reign of God must be transferred to heaven. No! The controversy is and remains, for it has not yet found its final decision in historically consummated execution, whether the God of heaven will manage to create and maintain here on this earth social, economic and political conditions which have no criticism to spare, which will finally bring the peoples of the earth to the longed-for peace; or whether the literal Kingdom of God on earth, once historically begun with Israel, should and must remain an unfulfilled dream, a divine utopia. We resolutely reject the imposition of recognizing today's conditions in state and church, in society and family, commerce and change, as the highest stage yet reached in the development of God's kingdom on earth, and of finding in them the direct, though not yet completed, fulfillment of the divine promises. The congregation of Jesus Christ has never had the calling nor the commission to bring about kingdom-of-God conditions in this eon on earth. The fact that it has nevertheless tried to do so and has worked itself to pieces does not prove that it is entitled to do so. It has happened to her like Abraham, who believed the divine promises of the coming seed, but for whom the fulfillment of the same lasted too long. He took the Egyptian maid and begat - Ishmael! Thus Christianity has entered into the covenant with the forces of the present eon, art, science and politics etc. and has begotten its "Ishmael", the highly praised Christian culture and civilization! With this now the other poor earth peoples are made happy by "Christian" governments, "Christian" war armies and tank fleets. Because "Ishmael is a wild man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him". This unspeakable mingling of Christianity, missionary instinct, commercialism, industrialism and politics of land theft is supposed to be the best form of the Kingdom of God on earth possible so far? Appalling! It is a distorted picture of the image designed by the spirit of prophecy, soaked with blood, tears, opium and liquor. But the prophecy is simple and definite, and, where it is not spiritualized, unambiguous enough. Isa. 2, 2-4; Micah 4, 1-5; Ps. 72. Praise God, it cannot and will not remain unfulfilled. Its final, blissful fulfillment through the future Isaac of God is guaranteed.

With the "(God's) service" further mentioned here it has a similar meaning. Also this word has nothing to do with any questions of congregational or church constitution, liturgical or cultic order for this age and for the church of Jesus Christ. In these Israel has nothing, nor are we as the Church of God dependent on Israel. But the word does look ahead to the time when the highest ideal and religious interests of Israel and the nations, like their temporal and economic interests, will be subject to the immediate divine order and direction, when true priesthood and true "kingship by the grace of God" will be united in perfect harmony on one throne, that of the Son of David. Zech. 6, 13. Already in its Levitical cultus Israel had before it a tangible reflection of the privileged position it was to occupy as Jehovah's firstborn son. For the sons of Levi fulfilled the service of all the firstborn of

the whole house of Israel. To this day, however, Israel has not yet fulfilled that calling. But it belongs to the inalienable and irrevocable things that it has, i.e. the time will come when it will definitely carry out and fulfill its calling for the blessing of the nations living then. But of course not in this age, not even by its fusion with the Christian nations or the Church of the Nations, but as a people in renewed theocratic independence and sole dependence on its Messiah, the Son of David.

And the "promises"? Surely they can only refer to the inexhaustible wealth of magnificent divine promises that the Lord himself would carry them out in his own way and in his own time through his spirit under the scepter of his anointed one to and with the disobedient house of Israel in his own land. From the wealth of such promises only these few: Ezek. 11:17-20, "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Yea, I will gather you from the nations, and gather you together out of the countries whither ye are scattered, and will give you the land of Israel. And they will come there and remove from it all its abominations and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them one heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them: and they shall be unto me a people, and I will be unto them a God. " And Ezek. 36, 24-30: "And I will take you out of the nations, and bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you; and I will make you walk in my statutes, and keep and do my judgments. And ye shall dwell in the land which I gave unto your fathers: and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will cleanse you from all your uncleannesses. And I will bring forth the corn, and multiply it, and will bring no more famine upon you; and I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the yield of the field, that ye bear no more the reproach of famine among the nations. " And Ezek. 37:21-28: "Thus says the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will take the children of Israel out of the nations whither they have gone, and I will gather them from round about, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, in the mountains of Israel, and they shall all have <u>one</u> king for a king; and they shall no more become two nations, neither shall they henceforth divide themselves into two kingdoms. And they shall defile themselves no more with their idols, and with their abominations, and with all their transgressions; and I will save them out of all their dwellings wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be unto me a people, and I will be unto them a God. And my servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; and they shall walk in my statutes, and keep and do my judgments. And they shall dwell in the land which I gave unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children's children, for ever: and David my servant shall be their ruler for ever. And my dwelling place shall be over them; and I will be to them for God, and they shall be to me for a people. And the nations shall know that I am Jehovah that sanctifieth Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in their midst for ever. "

That these and an abundance of other prophecies in their simple wording really state and substantiate what we read out of them here, cannot be denied by an honest interpretation of the Scriptures. Strangely enough, however, the decisive denial of this simple literal sense applies to "spiritual"! And not among rationalists or deniers of revelation, but among those who use exactly the same canon for the interpretation of the Scriptures as we do in regard to everything that lies behind us in the divine judgment and dispensation of grace in Israel, i.e. has become history - who in all this remain with us in the simple, natural literal sense of the Scriptures. But as soon as it comes to the still unfulfilled prophecy, another canon of interpretation must be invented. We resolutely refuse to use any other canon than the one according to which we recognize all the great acts of God that took place in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem and Golgotha as literal fulfillments of the prophetic word. We observe that if God had wanted to give us another standard for the still unfulfilled prophecy, he would have done so in the most unambiguous way through the Lord and his apostles. But the

apostles, too, as the theologians find immensely uncomfortable, did not use or know of any other. But an interpretation of Scripture that goes beyond the law of interpretation that is authoritative for the Lord and the apostles in self-chosen "spirituality" ceases to be Christian for us. It has no right to be heard at all.

But how even interpreters, who otherwise do not allow themselves such liberties with the Word of God, can declare that in this whole 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans there is indeed talk of spiritual, but by no means of national and political restoration of Israel in its land, is incomprehensible to us. However, it is not Paul's business to repeat in detail and to affirm in detail what is laid down very extensively in all the writings of the prophets about it. For him it was a foregone conclusion that there would be no lack of all that God had promised his people. Nor did he presuppose that his readers at that time had the slightest doubt about it, if the rejection of Israel as a people was really not final. The letter to the Romans presupposes readers to whom the whole Old Testament was genuine, undoubted word of God. Such readers have become very, very rare in Christianity. Therefore one thinks so easily, because here is not particularly repeated what all prophets have testified, so this is also not to be expected any more. One labors under the delusion as if every special promise to Israel that happened in the Old Testament had been either spiritualized by the New or placed under a completely different law of interpretation. What, then, is not found in as many words in the New Testament may not be recognized as rightly existing for Israel at all. But first of all it is obvious that Paul does not say a word here that could honestly be used as an argument against the hope of historical-political restoration of Israel in its land. Next, it is completely incomprehensible to us what can be meant by God's irrevocable "calling and gifts of grace" to Israel, if not the pieces which we have clearly recognized as such from earlier passages. If what Paul cites ch. 3, 1.2 and 9, 4 does not fully and completely coincide with what he here calls Israel's calling and gifts of grace, then we look in vain for an apt and comprehensive exposition in all the rest of Scripture. In those pieces, however, lies unsurpassably briefly what constitutes Israel's specific, theocratic-national calling and endowment in God's economy on earth. If Israel does not have these gifts of grace, then it has none at all. But if it has them, then it is idle to say that Romans 11 knows only of spiritual, but not of political and theocratic restoration of Israel in the divine household of the ages. The divine purpose with it is therefore still in force, its calling is not revoked, it will be as a people exponent of these gifts of grace among the peoples of a future eon.

A summary review

V 30, 31 For just as you once did not believe God, but now have come under pardon through the unbelief of these, so now these also have not believed in your pardon, so that they also come under pardon.

The apostle has reached the goal of his explanations. With a sure hand he was allowed to lead us up from the deep grounds of God's judicial ways with his people to the sunny heights of the eternal thoughts of love of this God with the same people. Now that we have ascended the heights, he shows to our free gaze the wonderfully intricate path that the great God has walked with the two groups of the family of nations, the firstborn Israel and with the rest of the peoples. These verses contain nothing less than a brief but comprehensive scheme of the divine work of salvation in the past, present and future. They are the key to the correct reading of all religious and world history. All philosophy of history has its touchstone in them.

Before we take a closer look at the words themselves, we have to deal with a deviating word order in verse 31. Weizsäcker and the English revision take out the words in verse 31 of the Gentiles' pardon in the first member of the sentence and bring them in connection with Israel's pardon in the

second member. In this reading it then reads, "so even now these have not believed, that they also might come under your pardon. " This is not the place to go into the text-grammatical reasons for such a reading. For linguistic reasons we do not believe the deviation to be either required or more excellent. For internal reasons we believe we may certainly reject it.

First, our reading is quite consistent with the facts. Israel undeniably came to national collapse at "our pardon." Their stubborn refusal to respond to God's thoughts with us Gentiles caused their complete sidelining during this age.

On the other hand, that reading contradicts the apostle's previous teachings about what will bring about Israel's national restoration. We must note what has come to us as an important distinction from the previous context of this chapter. In this eon all Israel is under judgment. But some will nevertheless be saved, a "remnant according to the election of grace." This takes place naturally and naturally through the Christian missionary and loving activity to Israel, that is, through "our pardon". Here, however, as we have clearly seen, Paul no longer speaks only of that remnant, but from v. 26 onward our gaze was unceasingly directed to the national conversion and restoration of all Israel that will take place at the conclusion of this aeon, after the entrance of the fullness of the nations. This, however, is by no means conceived as the fruit or result of "our pardon," i.e., of Christian missionary activity; rather, it is unequivocally ascribed to the coming of the Messiah "appearing to his waiting people for salvation another time." We also recognized that the conversion of all Israel on a national scale is by no means only a belated incorporation of the people into the People's Church of this age, but a re-grafting into "their own olive tree," i.e., a return to the original theocratic kingdom position and relationship, and thus the inauguration of a new economy of salvation for mankind on earth.

The present section naturally breaks down into four limbs, which we divide as follows:

a.) You pagans once did not believe God.

b.) Now you have come under the pardon - through the unbelief of Israel.

c.) So now these have not believed in your pardon,

d.) That they may also come under the pardon.

You once did not believe God

This word looks far back. It reaches beyond the time when God set a double course for the history of mankind by separating the seed of Abraham. It encloses the times from the flood up to the dawn of the present aeon. The eon before the Flood does not belong to the framework, since the actual, organized paganism arose only after the Flood. Before that there were neither nations nor legislation, neither priests nor any other divinely authorized authority. The organization of those days was the family. The patriarch was spiritual and natural head of his house and tribe. Only after the flood does Scripture know of actual state formation. Babel arises - the mother of lawlessness, germ and archetype of all conscious, organized idolatry and rebellion against the recognized will of God, in the political as well as in the religious sense. Only four centuries after the flood judgment the calling and separation of Abraham takes place. But another 500 years pass before his seed becomes a people and Jehovah establishes his own rule in Israel the kingdom of God on earth. If we take to heart that Noah, who by his faith had condemned the world of that time, survived the flood judgment by 350 years, Sem even by 500 years, we realize that the world of nations of that time was not without mighty witnesses of God. The same is confirmed to us by the appearance of a Melchizedek, the contemporary of Abraham among the kingdoms of the Canaanites. The fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, in their intercourse with the kings of their day, likewise testify that God did not leave himself unwitnessed to those peoples, even though they were allowed to go their own ways. He sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and set his people as a lamp unto the nations. Nor is there any

lack of clear traits of how the fear of Jehovah asserted itself among the nations because of God's great deeds to Israel. We recall Balak, Rahab's confession to Joshua's spies, the queen of Sheba, and more. (Num. 22; Jos. 2, 9-11; 2. Chron. 9, 1-8). Later, God gives His own people under the power of the Gentiles as punishment. Judah does not let itself be warned by the fate of Samaria. Jerusalem falls. Nebuchadnezzar is enfeoffed with world domination Dan. 2, 37-38. The time of the nations begins. Israel returning from Babylon is and remains a vassal state. Daniel is a faithful witness of Jehovah in Babylon under three dynasties against the idolatrous presumption of the kings of the nations. But all is in vain. The religious and moral decay of the highly cultivated world of nations is inexorably taking place with appalling consequence. The picture Paul draws of this in the first chapter of this letter is shocking.

But now you have come under the pardon

So the world of nations today is not "on trial", nor "under law", but under pardon through the blessed gospel of God. Not on probation, because both Jews and nations are under sin and have forfeited God's judgment against all ungodly beings. There can be no question of mankind first having to pass a test. We are a judged world of nations under condemnation, which has long since proved that it is totally unfit and completely lacks the glory of God, when it crucified the Lord of glory. It was the Jewish priesthood that cried out: Crucify! And the Gentile nations carried out the execution! The whole conception, which underlies all mere moral systems and according to which our life, even under the Gospel, is a time of trial, is quite crooked and in contradiction with the clear teaching of the Epistle to the Romans.

Equally questionable and erroneous is the other, common idea that we Gentiles are also still under law in this age. This expresses a complete misunderstanding of the great, glorious character of this time of salvation for us, the Gentiles, which consists of the fact that man is now justified without works of the law through His grace and the redemption that took place in Christ Jesus Rom. 3, 24. But if it is by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace K. 11, 6. How the understanding of the true character of the pardon that has come upon the nations is so unclear and stunted in Christendom; on the one hand by "essays of the elders", on the other hand by human philosophizing. And God has made such clear, wide paths, spoken so clearly.

Through the disbelief of these

It is and remains one of the deepest mysteries that we nations actually owe the crucified Christ to the stubborn unbelief of Israel, and the blood that not only cleanses from all sin, but also, according to Eph. 2, 13, has brought us, who were far away, close. In His flesh, the Crucified One removed the enmity and partition set up by God Himself through the law in commandments. So that now out of Jews and nations, between whom there was sin according to the law, ONE new man was created, the mystery of Christ, head and body, 1. Cor. 12, 12.

So now these have not believed in your pardon

A strange parallel. Paul had just said: "You nations once did not believe God". Now he says that in the same way Israel, the called people of God, had turned the light sent to them into darkness and therefore had become completely dark. For brighter rays of God's free, incomprehensible grace had never shone on earth than when God revealed to us Gentiles, the lost and the alien, the whole fullness of glory in Christ Jesus, and that before the eyes of Israel. For Peter and those with him in the house of Cornelius, when the fullness of the Spirit was given to the first Gentiles without circumcision or observance of the law, were Jewish men. So Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was an Israelite, as he himself points out. So at the greatest act of love of their God, the called spiritual leaders of the chosen people came to fall. There the word of the Lord: "But if the light in you is darkness, how great will be the darkness", found a shattering representation. But, a faithful God! that no official protests, not even those of the highest spiritual authority of his people prevented

him from carrying out his thoughts with us nations. It is precisely because of this that free, unhindered salvation has become ours. How little guarantee there is in mere official authority and undeniable expertise, albeit recognized by the Lord Himself, when it comes to God's ways of revelation. In this field, Christianity has experienced much and learned little in nineteen centuries.

That they may also come under the pardon

One would almost like to become suspicious of this "on that", and think, with a "so that" it would be also enough. But God must be right also in these small words. They often tell us so much. Here the "upon that" expresses in the most definite way the purposeful, planned procedure of God in His administration of the various successive ages and economies of salvation. It leaves no room at all for failure, deception, makeshift or patchwork of any kind on his part. God is conscious of his ways and works from the beginning. God has not cast off His people whom He has previously known. It raises us high above all frightening thoughts that want to seize and paralyze us at the sight of the mutual conditions, of Israel as well as of the Christianity of the nations. In the latter, among the appointed leaders and teachers, an increasing contempt for the revealed Word, a fatal mastery of the Scriptures; among the broad masses, hardly any higher goal than just "to go to heaven" and to enjoy blessedness! There with Israel on the one hand a desperate clinging to the traditional old, which one sees sinking before the onslaught of a new time, on the other hand the poor, trodden people an easy prey of false prophets, who preach to it self-help and self-salvation; not to speak of the dreadful caricature of the so-called reform Judaism.

If we had not to do with a divine purposeful "on that", we would be afraid of the final execution of the future thoughts sketched here in indescribably great features with the people of his choice. But it is he who created his image from the dust of the earth; who elevates a despised Nazarene to the right hand of his majesty; who makes real, fully entitled "sons of God" out of children of wrath. It is His glory to produce the most glorious from the most desperate material.

An unfathomable counsel of grace

V. 32: For God has shut up all together in unbelief, that he might pardon all.

We will not have to grasp this word as something actually new, which has only been introduced here. First of all, it clearly confronts us with what we have often had the opportunity to observe, that the illumination of the great questions at hand does not take place from the point of view of the individual, the single person. In the first part of this epistle, the apostle did justice to the question of the personal conditions of salvation. Here we have to do with the entirety of nations and with God's procedure concerning them. Not personal salvation doctrine, but kingdom doctrine is given to us here. Just as we distinguish in the field of jurisprudence between private and international law. This is made clear to us by the connecting and justifying "for" with which this thesis is introduced. If the two preceding verses gave us the scheme of the divine salvific activity for the ages past, present and future, Paul now summarizes the divine leitmotif for all his hidden activity in this weighty and delicious word. God thus reveals to us how the great bodies of people and mankind in their totality have been, are and will be in the future the object of divine judgments and mercy.

The fact that the course of his exposition of the Jewish question naturally leads the apostle to this point and gives him occasion for such a comprehensive characterization of the divine activity, encompassing the whole of mankind, is again a striking proof of the high significance of Israel in the whole sphere of divine stewardship. Israel's position is and remains central. It is the key to the correct knowledge and evaluation of all other divine activity in history. Without a clear insight into God's procedure with the people of His choice, an understanding of God's thoughts with the rest of mankind cannot be attained. For: "When the Most High distributed the inheritance to the nations,

when he separated the children of men from one another, he established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel" Deut. 32, 8. But since God's gifts of grace and calling are irrevocable, it will also be the case that for the future the fate of Israel will be the guiding and decisive factor for the fate of the other nations on earth. Indeed, we find this thought strongly emphasized in the prophecy concerning Israel's great, blessed future. Compare Isa. 2, 3.4; 49, 22.23; 60, 3. 16; Zech. 8, 21-23.

But let us now approach the content of the present verse itself. First of all, we will have to determine who the apostle has in mind by the term "all". The context makes it clear. Already from verse 11 on, his whole exposition moved in manifold comparisons and contrasts of Israel as a whole people on the one hand and the nations in their totality on the other hand. The whole speech concerns God's rule, not with individual people, but with the whole mankind, as it is divided into two groups, which are very different in extent. We therefore hold that the present word is to be applied to these two parts of the human family, to the Jews as well as to the nations. It has just been shown how we Gentiles once did not believe God, although there was no lack of opportunity and effective testimony. In that time of pagan darkness God let his light of revelation rise and shine in Israel. But his people did not recognize the truth sent to them. Because of this, we nations came under pardon; their harm became our wealth, their fall our salvation. But Israel, still blinded today, will also come under pardon; for God shut them all together under unbelief, that he pardoned them all. Thus the apparent partiality of God finds its satisfactory explanation. It is a wonderful interplay of divine judgments and graces. No part of the great human race can point to the other and claim to have been set back before that one. In the consummation of the ages, the apparent dissonances are resolved into a consummate harmony.

To the question of the scope and extent of this "all" we cannot answer in any other way than we did in v. 26, when we were faced with the question of how to take the word "all Israel". For it is undeniable that the parallelism of this verse is an absolute one, i.e., it is simply not acceptable to try to make something else out of the "them all" in the second member of this expression than it means in the first member. We hold, then, that the scope and extent of the pardon fully coincide with the limits of being shut up under unbelief. In the case of Israel we found above unambiguous scriptural evidence to justify such an assumption. The question now is whether in the realm of divine revelation an equally clear word is to be found concerning the nations given over to judgment. That therefore also with them the same principle will apply and that God pursues no other purpose with them than with the people of his choice. The Lord has given us such a word with Ezk 16, 44-63. However, the great theme of that prophecy is the pardon of the horribly fallen houses of Israel and Judah. But in a wonderful way Jehovah's thoughts of grace also about the Gentile Sodom and her daughters (-cities) are connected with it, just as we may expect from the biblical depictions of the importance of Israel for the salvation life of the world of nations.

We cannot, of course, concern ourselves here with a detailed explanation of that prophetic word, but of necessity confine ourselves to the consideration of a few verses. In v. 53 Jehovah says: "And I will turn away their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and of her daughters, and the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them; that thou mayest bear thy reproach, and be ashamed of all that thou hast done, comforting them. " That the captivity of Sodom should not be interpreted to mean a political exile is self-evident, for such did not take place. The only possible interpretation for this designation is their descent into Sheol (Hades), as a consequence of the terrible judgment by fire that Jehovah exercised on them because of their nameless abominations Gen. 19, 24-25, 28-29. Lk. 17, 29. 2 Petr. 2, 6; Jude 7. That in Scripture such a descent into Sheol is conceived as a prison is shown by the following passages, among others: Ps. 68, 19; Eph. 4, 8; Job 3, 18; Isa. 24, 22; Zech. 9, 11-12; 1. Petr. 3, 19. From this captivity they are to return to their former state according to this concise explanation of the Lord in v. 55, as well as Samaria and Jerusalem. Furthermore, according to v. 61, they are to be assigned as daughters to the repentant and pardoned Jerusalem along with

the other cities according to an eternal covenant that the Lord Himself will establish with Jerusalem and that is unmistakably a high covenant of grace, as is evident from the final word (v. 63): if I forgive you all that you have done.

These are words that find their illumination and confirmation from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Himself Mt. 10, 15; 11, 24; Lk. 10, 12. For whatever may be meant by the "going more tolerably in that day", it presupposes in any case exactly what Ezk. 16, 55 takes into certain prospect, namely their return from Sheol and the judgment by fire that affected them into the former state, i.e. the natural life on earth. It is also obvious that in the case of Sodom there can be no question of the promise made to that city to be fulfilled in a later generation, which is done so gladly with Israel. For those Sodomites perished with wives and children and left no natural offspring on earth. We are therefore limited for any real fulfillment of this divine promise simply to that identical generation on which the horrible judgment of Jehovah took place.

The words of the Lord Jesus make it equally impossible to place the fulfillment anywhere in the past. The Last Day is undoubtedly not behind us, but ahead of us as before Sodom and Jerusalem.

This is justification enough to extend the divine thoughts of pardon backwards to all of them who, in the hidden wisdom of God, are given over to judgment, for as such it is unmistakably to be grasped, to being shut up under unbelief.

If Ezekiel 16 is as much God's word as Isa. 53 and may be understood in its natural literal meaning as the latter, then it is impossible to hold on to the popular idea according to which a mankind doomed to death and judgment is raptured by the act itself from the sphere of all possible salvation and grace of God. The same is true if the apostle's remarks in this chapter about the future lot of all Israel, which has hitherto fallen into the judgment of delusion, are allowed to stand without deduction according to their full wording. It follows from both examples that neither judgment by fire nor hardening, i.e., the most severe and terrible punishments of God imaginable for stubborn unbelief and for atrocious misdeeds, are to be regarded as absolutely final as far as the final fate of those affected by them is concerned. If it is asked how this can happen, we answer that it is written that "for this purpose Christ died and came to life again, that he might have dominion over both the dead and the living" Rom. 14:9; that through "death he destroyed him who had the power of death-the devil" Heb. 2:14; that he "was dead and is alive throughout the ages, and has the keys of death and of Hades. "Rev. 1, 18.

That severe, devastating visitations upon the nations are very frequently depicted in the OT with the certain educational purpose and aim, that those thus slain and sent down to Sheol may realize "that they are but men," that Jehovah alone is God. The following scriptural passages make it clear: Ps. 9, 20-21; 22, 27-31 (28-32); 83; Ezek. 38, 16. 23; Dan. 4, 17. 25-26 (14. 22. 23).

And that such judgments will have the desired success, God's word assures us extensively: Ps. 72, 11.17;86, 9; 102, 15; Is. 25, 7; 60, 3; Ez. 39, 7. 23; Micah 7, 16; Zech. 14, 6; Mal. 1, 11.

We are therefore by no means moving on the uncertain ground of philosophical speculation, but are only concerned to let all scripture come to its full right, without regard, however, to doctrinal opinions or doctrinal systems.

O Depth of Richness

V. 33-36: O depth of riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has been his fellow counselor? Or who hath given him before, and it shall be recompensed him? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

An outburst of adoring admiration and holy astonishment, carried and permeated not only by a high personal feeling of bliss because of the invincible certainty of the glory of a called and sealed child of God, as it naturally found its expression at the end of Rom. 8; - but it is the transformation of the lamentation of the apostle at the beginning of this passage, chap. 9,1.2 about his brothers according to the flesh, which was expressed with holy passion, into a quiet, serious satisfaction of the enlightened spirit, accompanied by holy deep shudders, which manifests itself because of the seen outcome of God's ways of judgment with Israel. There is no occasion here for mere expressions of emotion. It is not a matter of feeling or enjoyment or of personal experience in general. However, conscious, blessed, victorious sonship, as it is presented in Rom. 8, is the prerequisite for the messages in chapters 9-11. It is deepest factual logic that first chapter 8 has to be believed and experienced before we are sent to follow the apostle into the depths of chapters 9-11. Certainly, in the victorious outlook on principalities, angels and powers, present and future, heights and depths - the Spirit has already pointed to the enormous problems of God's world-encompassing administration of salvation in judgment and grace, before which he will place the chosen sons of God according to their sonship, and into which he will let them look. There is undoubtedly an inner, factual connection. This is the high seriousness of the vocation to true sonship with God, that it means participation in the depths of God. It must be willing to feel and bear pain and sorrow for others, resting steadfastly in God's unchanging faithfulness, even when God's path leads His own elect through gruesome grounds of abandonment and delusion. God will and must be right in all circumstances. Without that, there can be no beatitude, no heaven, no glory, no sonship either. For the firstborn among many brothers no other way to his perfection was possible than through such depths Hebr. 2, 10; 5, 7-9.

The depths of the wealth of wisdom and knowledge are spoken of here. This is not spoken of our knowledge, as it has God and his rule as its object. Otherwise, the apostle would almost be admiring himself for expressing such deep thoughts here. The connection of knowledge with wisdom leaves no doubt about to whom they both belong. It is the rich depths of God's own wisdom and knowledge, which, through the Spirit that searches all things, including the depths of God, have opened up to the yearning and now deeply satisfied gaze of the apostle. It is wisdom which, in all circumstances, strives for and achieves its ends, clearly grasped by consummate knowledge, by the best means. Prudence is human, wisdom is divine. For its greatest development and manifestation, the great God has chosen the history and judgments of Israel, after it is written: This people, which I have formed, they shall tell my glory Isa. 43, 21. And Ezk. 36, 22. 32: Not for your sake do I, O house of Israel, let it be known unto you, but for my holy name's sake.

Paul calls God's judgments unsearchable and his ways inscrutable. Neither in the one nor in the other expression is there even an allusion to obscurity or darkness in divine counseling and planning. God has no reason whatsoever, as we so often do, to shroud his deep counsels in profound darkness. He truly does not need to be ashamed of them, nor to fear criticism. After all, he has just opened the eyes of his servant Paul wide and brightly into these rich depths of wisdom and knowledge. But just as the cloudless clarity of the sky above us does not reveal the limits of the airspace, but only its boundless expanse, so the brightest glimpses that the enlightened spirit is allowed to take into the depths of God make it all the more clear that human research and questioning alone can never lead to the goal of knowledge. This does not mean that God is jealous to keep his deep thoughts closed, but only that he takes care that no created spirit without revelation ever knows the end of his ways. 1 Cor. 2:10, 11: For the spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. - But no one knows what is in God except the Spirit of God.

The apostle distinguishes between judgments and ways of God. This is significant. Also significant is the order in which both terms follow each other. Judgment comes first. For we are all under sin. No one is blameless before God. From this it is clear that all of God's ways of salvation with fallen mankind can only lead through judgment. The word of the Lord John 5:24: He who hears my word and

believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life, remains true because every believer recognizes and confesses himself to be judged in Christ through faith. But in the judgments the ways of God are by no means exhausted or finished. The ways follow the judgments. If the latter have to do with the cause of divine salvation, the ways point to the great redemptive goals that God has set for himself through the judgments. Judgments must come because we are what we are. God makes his way and goes his way because of who he is. And the richness of his wisdom and knowledge guarantees their execution and realization.

To justify this, Paul directly cites, as if it were his own argument, two Old Testament scriptural words, both of which are taken from a strange context. The apostle's first question: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? "There the words are placed between a reference of Jehovah to the wonders of his creation (v. 12) and another to the great measures of his world government (v. 15). Although both areas have been before the observing and examining gaze of his thinking creatures for millennia, God may still today, in spite of all progress of knowledge, meet the proud spirit of man with the same challenge. It stands and will stand. In both fields our deepest thinkers and researchers will always have to owe him the answer. How much more so here, however, where it is specifically a question of God's judgment and ways, i.e. of His marvelous events for the redemption of a lost world. But must the spirit of man fall silent already on the first question, who is, who can undertake it, to even want to rise up to the co-advisor of God now? Who would give him understanding, teach him insight and knowledge, or show him the path of right? Only God can and may have his say here, although there is no lack of little people who believe they are called to master the word of the Most High and to criticize it instead of letting themselves be judged, i.e. put right, by it Hebr. 4, 12. Human presumption knows no limits.

The other word: Who has given him before, and it will be repaid to him? is taken from the great controversy of Jehovah with Job (41:2), who was so severely beaten and in agreement with God, at the point where the judgments of God on his servant turn into ways of salvation. It means in its content an increase even beyond the content of the second question, namely, whether there is one among God's creatures to whom God is obliged to reciprocate because of received benefits. The question is not without sharp relation to the opinion of the very people to whom Paul belongs and whose case is being discussed here. Pagan (unfortunately also Gentile-Christian) presumption appears especially in the two other areas. For in cleverly devised systems of knowledge, in ostentatious pride in knowledge, in exaltation over all revealed truth, we nations perform the humanly possible. Israel fell under the other delusion that it could commit itself to its God by pious achievements and by works of the law. As Jewish tradition still teaches today: On the day when not a single one of the commandments is transgressed in all Israel, the Messiah will come! Until this day Israel would like to appear in the role of Job, as a people that practices justice and has not left the law of its God Is. 58, 2. As Paul testifies to them from his own vivid memory - because he was a Pharisee according to the zeal in the law - Israel had striven for the law of justice, but had not attained it. Why? Because they did not strive for it by faith (as judged), but by works (i.e. as able-bodied) Rom. 9, 31-32. Thus human, religious presumption found its highest exponent, but also its judgment, in Israel, the most religious people on earth.

And now it remains for us only the simple, summary explanation of the absolute independence of God in relation to our complete dependence on him: For from him and through him and for him are all things. In this is included not only the inquiring, thinking and worshipping - the judged and pardoned mankind, but all things, the whole created universe. For God put all things - the universe - under the feet of the Son of Man. And at the "revelation of the sons of God" (the firstborn and his many brethren), indeed, "the creation will be set free from the bondage of corruption to the freedom of the glory of the children of God" Rom. 8:19-21. For everything, from the first plan and counsel, through all "judgments" and "ways," up to the great goal of the glorification of the Son by the Father and of the Father by the Son - for everything God and God alone is responsible. He has used

his honor for it, given his name as a pledge, without doing violence to a single one of his creatures or limiting them in their moral freedom.

To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.