

The Gospel in Romans: Romans 11:25-32

INTRODUCTION

1. We have come near to the end of one of the most challenging units in Romans, maybe even in the entire NT.
 - Paul has endeavored to reconcile God's covenant promises to Israel in the OT with their general unbelief.
 - In doing so he has affirmed both God's sovereign election unto salvation and humanity's depraved rebellion.
2. But what lies ahead? This section is one of the most important in all of Scripture for understanding Israel's future.
 - Unfortunately, all of us tend to read this passage (and others) in light of our prior conclusions about doctrine.
 - This passage says some things clearly and others in a more ambiguous way; we must be cautious and humble.
3. We will unpack these verses by asking and answering four questions key to understanding the passage.

I. WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?

A. *The General Concept of "Mystery" in Paul's Letters*

1. Paul often uses the term *mystery* to describe important aspects of the gospel he preaches.
 - The mystery of the gospel can only be known and understood by divine revelation. **Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4**
 - It was a mystery before the cross, but now it is no longer hidden; it has been revealed. **Col. 1:26**
2. Though the term is used a few different ways, it often refers to Gentile inclusion in Christ. **Eph. 3:6**
 - More broadly, the mystery is God's plan to save all believers in Christ. **Eph. 3:8-12; Col. 1:27**
 - We are saved, both Jews and Gentiles, by being united in one Body in Christ by His sacrificial work.

B. *The Specific Concept of "Mystery" in Romans 11*

1. In Romans 11 Paul has a more specific aspect of the *mystery* in mind that relates to Jews and Gentiles.
 - A *partial* hardening had come on Israel, and this hardening facilitates the conversion of the Gentiles.
 - As we noted in our last study, rejection of the gospel by many Jews opened doors to the Gentiles.
2. The hardening of Israel is not total, not absolute, and not necessarily final; it is partial and purposeful.
 - Nor does the hardening change Israel's historic and covenantal role and significance. **vv.28-29; 9:4-5**
 - Jews have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved, but most remain hardened to the gospel.
3. So the mystery, in this specific context, can be summarized by three points:
 - A partial hardening has come upon Israel
 - This hardening will continue until the fullness of the (elect) Gentiles has come in (to Christ)
 - And in this way all Israel will be saved

II. IN WHAT SENSE WILL ISRAEL BE SAVED?

A. *The Expectation of Political or National Redemption*

1. Many interpret the salvation in this passage more as national recovery than individual salvation.
 - They may believe this promise guarantees the Jews will believe in Christ and be saved.
 - But they insist the promise is to ethnic Israel as a nation and does not apply to the Church.
"There are those who interpret this as meaning salvation to individuals through the Gospel, but it is my conviction that the prophet has national conversion in mind. 'All Israel shall be saved' does not mean that every Jew who has ever lived will be converted, but that the Jews living when the Redeemer returns will see Him, receive Him, and be saved. Zechariah 12-13 give the details. It seems to me that there are too many details of national restoration for Israel for us to spiritualize them and apply them to the church today." –Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* Vol. 1, pp.552-553
2. The question of Israel's national or political reconstitution is a larger issue involving many passages.
 - But one thing we must see here: the salvation Paul has in mind is not political; it is spiritual.
 - The entire context of chapters 9-11 relate to the spiritual salvation of the Jews. **9:1-3, 30-32a; 10:1-4**

B. *The Promise of Spiritual Salvation*

1. Paul has argued at length that God has chosen whom to save and will save all He chose. **9:10-18, 22-24**
 - God has not rejected *His people whom He foreknew*: this is the language of election! **11:2**
 - But God has not *foreknown* (i.e. fore-loved, chosen to save) every Jewish (or Gentile) person. **11:5-6**
2. God never promised salvation to every ethnic Israelite; salvation is by grace, not biology or genealogy.
 - Chapters 9-11, when read in context, are an extended argument demonstrating God's faithfulness.
 - By saving whoever believes in Jesus Christ, Jew or Gentile, God is keeping His promises to Abraham.
3. In what sense is ethnic Israel elect? They are descendants of Abraham and promise-bearers. **3:1-2; 9:4-5**
 - But only a remnant of Israel will be saved; as it was in Elijah's day, so it is today. **11:2-6, 7-10**
 - Salvation cannot be based on gracious election in ch.9-11a, but then be based on ethnicity in ch.11b.

III. IN WHAT WAY WILL ISRAEL BE SAVED?

A. A Deliverer Bringing Repentance

1. Paul turns once again to Isaiah in order to defend his understanding of the gospel in light of the OT.
 - The salvation and restoration announced by the prophets was a spiritual hope, not a political one.
 - Yet the Jews of Jesus' day so desired a political savior, they rejected Jesus and took Barabbas!
2. How would salvation come to Israel? By the coming of a Deliverer bringing repentance, banishing sin.
 - This quotation makes Paul's discussion explicitly Messianic and redemptive; it is about forgiveness.
 - What is Israel's problem? They remain in their sin. What is their only hope? Faith in Jesus as Christ.

"Romans 11 cannot be wrenched from the context of Rom. 9-11 as a whole. What troubles Paul is that Israel is separated *from Christ* (9:3). He indicts Israel at length for failing to believe in him (9:31-10:8) and proceeds to argue that salvation for both Jews and Gentiles comes only through believing in Christ (10:9-13). Indeed, Israel should have believed in him, for they had clearly heard the message of the gospel (10:14-21). When Paul introduces himself as an example of the saved remnant (11:1-6), he qualifies as such because he believes in Christ.... Paul never envisioned a salvation for Israel apart from trusting Jesus as Messiah."

—T. Schreiner, *Romans*, p.616, emp. in original

B. A Covenant of Forgiveness

1. God had been and would continue to be faithful to His covenant. But what is promised and to whom?
 - It is a covenant of forgiveness, not of nation-building, a covenant with elect Israel, not ethnic Israel.
 - It is a covenant of grace wherein those foreknown by God are eternally saved and loved by Him.
2. These promises never belonged to Esau, Korah, Ahab, or Judas, but to Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Paul.

IV. WHO IS THE "ISRAEL" THAT WILL BE SAVED?

A. Four Interpretive Possibilities

1. National and Political Restoration and Salvation of Most (All?) Jews (Dispensationalism)
 - As noted earlier, many interpret this prophecy in more national than individual terms.
 - Thus the hope is for political reconstitution and the restoration of Israel as a sovereign nation.
 - Many see Israel's establishment in 1948 and her presence today as the start of such a fulfillment.
 - This view encompasses far more than just this text, so addressing it would require far more time.
 - I consider it to be a significant misreading not only of Romans 11 but much of Bible prophecy.
 - Advocates will insist on reading v.26 this way in view of many other passages they think support it.
 - But contrary to such a reading, notice Paul nowhere speaks in political or national terms.
 - The salvation throughout this letter is clearly spiritual, including in these verses. **26b-27**
 - The only way to make national or political redemption the focus is to bring it with you into the text.
 - Some even go so far as to suggest all Jews who ever lived will be given an opportunity and be saved.
 - But this would directly contradict what was said in chapter 9 of many being accursed. (cf. Lk. 13:28)
 - At most this can only point to the salvation of majority of Jews living at a given point in time.
2. Future Mass Conversion of Many Jews
 - Many commentators believe v.26 points to a large-scale future conversion of Jews to Christ.
 - This view takes Paul's comment as temporal or chronological: Gentiles saved, *and then* the Jews.
 - The KJV and NASB can be more easily read in this way: "*and so* all Israel shall be saved" (KJV).
 - It is certainly possible Paul could be giving a chronology of future conversion. **30-31**
 - The idea would be that once all of the elect Gentiles are saved, God will convert the Jews.
 - This would not necessarily mean every single Jewish person, but the great majority alive then.
 - John Piper gives a concise defense of this view: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-reasons-i-believe-romans-11-26-means-a-future-conversion-for-israel>
3. Conversion of All Elect Jews
 - This position recognizes the weakness of the above two views but still takes *Israel* in ethnic terms.
 - Israel* appears 11x in 9 verses in chapters 9-11, and 9 of the 10 prior to v.26 refer to ethnic Jews.
 - Therefore a strong argument can be made that *Israel* must refer to ethnic Israelites in v.26 also.
 - Where this view departs from the former is in the scale and timing of its expectations.
 - The object of the promise is understood to be all of the elect Jews, not all of Israel generally. **9:6**
 - Likewise the conversions will probably accumulate over time, not in a dramatic event at the end.
 - So this view says God will continue to save Jews until the fullness of the Gentiles (and Jews) is in.

4. Spiritual Israel (the Church) Composed of Jews and Gentiles

- The final interpretation is that *Israel* in v.26 refers to “the Israel of God,” i.e. the Church. **Gal. 6:16**
-This view has fallen out of favor in modern scholarship, but it remains a compelling possibility.
-The apostle used the term *Israel* this way at the beginning of chapters 9-11. **9:6; cf. 2:28-29**
- John Calvin gave this view its classic formulation in his commentary on Romans:
“Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word Israel to all the people of God, according to this meaning, — ‘When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God’s family.’ This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world. The same manner of speaking we find in Galatians 6:16. The Israel of God is what he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles; and he sets the people, thus collected from their dispersion, in opposition to the carnal children of Abraham, who had departed from his faith.” —John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, s.v. 11:26
- Notice Calvin does not deny later Jewish conversions, but he reads the term *Israel* in a spiritual way.

B. *The Interpretive Clues to the Correct Reading*

1. οὕτως – *in this way*

- The word translated *so* (KJV) or *in this way* (ESV) refers to the manner of salvation, not its timing.
-The significance is not “*and then*” but rather “*thus* all Israel will be saved.” **cf. 9:20; 10:6; 11:5, 31**
-Examination of the 250 uses in NT uncovered only *one* that is probably a temporal use. (Acts 20:11)
- Paul is not saying *after* the fullness of the Gentiles comes in *then* all of the Jews will be saved.
- He is saying all Israel will be saved “in this way,” by the uniting of elect Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

2. παῖς Ἰσραὴλ – *all Israel*

- The word *Israel* refers to ethnic Jews in at least 9 of the 11 uses in this letter.
-But Paul established a precedent for using it in a spiritualized way in **9:6**. (cf. Gal. 6:16)
-It is possible at the beginning and end of this section (9:6; 11:26) Paul is making a play on the word.
- What does he mean by saying elect Jews are saved, Gentiles are saved, thus ALL Israel will be saved?
- The word *all* suggests that the word *Israel* is being used in a different sense than the 9x before.

3. Can *Israel* have a different sense in v.26 than it does in vv.25?

- Many commentators say ‘No,’ but the same commentators must be inconsistent in v.32.
-In v.32 the word *all* (πάντας) is used two different ways, unless we believe it teaches universalism.
-*All* (without exception) are disobedient, but *all* (without distinction) will be shown mercy.
- If the same word in the same verse can have two senses, surely the same is true of *Israel*.

4. These considerations persuade me Paul is using *Israel* in the sense of *elect Israel* or of *the Israel of God*.

V. **APPLICATION: VERSES 30-32**

A. *Human Disobedience Precedes Divine Mercy*

1. Paul highlights the universal condemnation of humanity so we might properly understand God’s grace.
 - It is only by the grace and mercy of God received in Christ that any can be or ever will be saved.
 - The depravity of all humanity precludes any basis for boasting and compels us to trust Christ alone.
2. We have nothing to boast in, not our family, not our honesty, not our faith, not our faithfulness.
 - All the merit involved in our justification belongs to Christ; we are saved by His work, not our own.
 - Further, whatever good may be found in us, we owe to Christ; it is His gift, not our own. **Eph. 2:8-10**

B. *All Are Disobedient, So That Mercy May Be Given To All*

1. The partial hardening of Israel should convince all of us, Jew and Gentile, of our need for Christ.
 - There is no ground for trusting in ourselves or in our heritage or in our religion, only in Christ.
 - The hardening and condemnation even of much of Israel displays our desperate need for grace.
2. Here is God’s promise: whoever believes in the Lord Jesus will be saved, Jew or Gentile, all who believe.
 - All are consigned to disobedience, every single person; we are all under wrath, even the Israelites.
 - But all who believe will be saved; only those who believe will be, but everyone who believes will be.
3. So trust in Christ, focus on Christ, celebrate Christ, and stay close to Christ; He is our only hope.

Ephesians 1:9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

Ephesians 3:3-4 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Colossians 1:26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Ephesians 3:6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Ephesians 3:8-12 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

Colossians 1:27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Galatians 6:16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Rom 9:20 μενοῦνγε, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ ἀνταποκρινόμενος τῷ Θεῷ; μὴ ἐρεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι, τί με ἐποίησας οὕτως (**like this**);

Rom 10:6 ἡ δὲ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοσύνη οὕτω (**thus**) λέγει (speaks)· μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; τοῦτ' ἔστι Χριστὸν καταγαγεῖν·

Rom 11:5 οὕτως (**So**) οὖν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ λείμμα κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος γέγονεν.

Rom 11:31 οὕτω (**so**) καὶ οὗτοι νῦν ἠπειθήσαν, τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἐλέει ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθῶσι·