All Israel Will Be Saved?

Romans 11

Today I will be preaching from Romans chapter 11. This chapter is rich and deep. Ultimately it is one of the Apostle Paul’s attempts to explain to Jewish and Gentile believers how they are connected with each other and with God. And it is also a warning…

To ethnic Jews, those whose lineage came from national Israel. He is warning them not to rely on their nationality to save them.

And he is warning the Gentiles that they should not get cocky about finding favor with God, instead they should count God’s blessings as reason to have even more faith.

In church circles, this chapter, and certain interpretations of it, have led to huge divisions. Today I hope to help you better understand the passage, which may mean that your previous understanding of this chapter may be challenged. Let’s begin with chapter 10, verse 21.

**21But regarding Israel, God said,**

**“All day long I opened my arms to them,
    but they were disobedient and rebellious.”**

**God’s Mercy on Israel**

**11 I ask, then, has God rejected his own people, the nation of Israel? Of course not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.**

**2No, God has not rejected his own people, whom he chose from the very beginning. Do you realize what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said, 3“Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”**

**4And do you remember God’s reply? He said, “No, I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!”**

**Back in the day, not everyone from the nation of Israel had faith in God. And Paul, continuing on says:**

**5It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God’s grace—his undeserved kindness in choosing them. 6And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God’s grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.**

God’s free and undeserved grace, that was offered to all, was offered because He chose to offer it. And for anyone who believed and accepted it, they were saved and count themselves “chosen” because He chose to show His kindness. But not everyone in Israel found God’s free and undeserved grace…that is because they were pretty self-righteous and works based.

**7So this is the situation: Most of the people of Israel have not found the favor of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen—but the hearts of the rest were hardened. 8As the Scriptures say,**

**“God has put them into a deep sleep.
To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see,
    and closed their ears so they do not hear.”**

**9Likewise, David said,**

**“Let their bountiful table become a snare,
    a trap that makes them think all is well.
Let their blessings cause them to stumble,
    and let them get what they deserve.
10Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see,
    and let their backs be bent forever.”**

Have you ever had things so good that life just kind of lost it’s excitement? You know, it’s like driving a luxury car, it’s really smooth, and feels kind of uneventful. In fact, you are probably a lot more likely to fall asleep at the wheel driving a Mercedes than a 1979 F-350 with 38” tires. One almost drives itself and the other, if you aren’t paying attention, might bounce you right off the road. Israel had it so good…

“Their bountiful table became a snare…and their blessings caused them to stumble…”

Paul even quotes David as saying: “…let their backs be bent forever.”

But God did not forsake Israel forever…As Paul affirms in these next verses.

**11Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. 12Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God’s offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.**

When God chose to make it clear that His message of salvation was open to Gentiles; it was like a huge pothole in the road for the Mercedes driver. It was supposed to be a wake up call for the Jews. That’s why Paul says:

**13I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, 14for** **I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them.**

God’s favor to non-Jews was meant to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. For future reference, today I want to bring to your attention that Paul said “so I might save some of them.” But this will come up later.

**15For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead! 16And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy—just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.**

There is nothing sweeter, and more inspiring, than someone who was…

Circumcised on the eighth day

A pure blooded citizen of Israel

A member of the tribe of Benjamin

A Hebrew of Hebrews

And a member of the Pharisees

And yet they count that all worthless because of knowing the messiah and His merciful saving kindness. But some weren’t like the apostle Paul for some their heritage wrongly understood caused them to miss out on the best blessings of God. Verse 17 goes on to say…

**17But some of these branches from Abraham’s tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God’s special olive tree. 18But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.**

Before we go any further let’s consider the picture of the Olive Tree. God is the root, Christ (and the gospel message) is the trunk, those of ethnic Israel were the natural branches, and Gentiles were the branches that were grafted in.

**19“Well,” you may say, “those branches were broken off to make room for me.” 20Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn’t believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don’t think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. 21For if God did not spare the original branches, he won’t spare you either.**

Today we know for sure that Christ and the gospel message is open to Jew and Gentile alike. As was written in Galatians 3:

**26**For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. **27**And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. **28**There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

But if they, as gentile believers, got cocky and started relying on something other than God’s grace, then God would take His message elsewhere. Maybe even back to the Jews.

**22Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off. 23And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. 24You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.**

**God’s Mercy Is for Everyone**

This passage is not about losing your salvation. It is helping us to understand that when a people group gets proud of themselves as “God’s best.” They, as a people group, start to lose their receptiveness to the gospel.

Think of it this way. If I told my kids that since I was a pastor, they were better and more holy than other kids, it would be quite a bit harder for them to hear that they were sinners who needed God’s grace. Paul is trying to help believers keep pride out of the picture so that their message to others will not be hindered.

He goes on to say:

**25I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. 26And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say,**

**“The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem,
    and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.
27And this is my covenant with them,
    that I will take away their sins.”**

This is the point, in the chapter, where multiple interpretations come in. What does Paul mean when he says “All Israel will be saved?”

There are three main interpretations of “All Israel will be saved.”

1…The most popular view…All (or at least a large number of) ethnic Jews will be saved at some future prophetic time.

2…William Hendricksen’s view…All elect Jews will be save throughout the course of human history

3. John Calvin’s view…All true spiritual Israel (all who believe) will be saved through human history

Let me start by saying that “All Israel will be saved” cannot mean that every ethnic Jew of all time will be saved. Paul would never have said in Romans 9:

**“ 2My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief 3for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.”**

And likewise Romans 11:14

**“I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them.”**

These wouldn’t make sense if people were going to be saved simply because they were Jewish. Instead Paul, in Romans 9 (which is highly related to chapter 11) chose to clarify what it meant to truly be an Israelite:

**6Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! 7Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,” though Abraham had other children, too. 8This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children.**

Many people when they read Romans 11:25-26 hear it like this:

**25I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. 26And (after that God will start working with Jews again) so all Israel will be saved.**

But it doesn’t say this. In fact a better translation of verse 25-27 would be:

**25Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,**

**“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
    he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
27“and this will be my covenant with them
    when I take away their sins.”**

One commentator said of the Greek word houtos:

“The basic meaning is ‘until’ and is…implying the end of something. But context alone determines whether the emphasis is upon what happens after the endo of something or upon the end itself. For example…when Paul wrote that Christ must reign ‘until He has put all His enemies under His feet.’ The point was not that there was a time that Christ would no longer reign…The interpretive question of Romans 11:25 is whether Paul was speaking of a time when the partial hardening of Israel would be reversed or when the hardening is eschatologically fulfilled.”

I do not believe that Paul is talking about a partial hardening that is going to be reversed someday. He is talking about “the” partial hardening being the part of the method God used to save all of His people through the gospel. As one commentator wrote:

“Paul is therefore talking about a process that is taking place within his generation, and will continue to take place *‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’*. Paul does not speak here of anything happening after *‘the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’*. Instead, Paul describes the current situation, stating that it will last *‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’*, and he goes on to say *‘and in this way all Israel will be saved’*. This is Paul’s summary of the process that is **currently** taking place. At the end of this process, *‘all Israel’* will have been saved. Paul does not say “and then after this something else will happen which will result in all Israel being saved”.

The term *‘in this way’* (or *‘so’*) links verse 26 with verse 25. It is the situation of verse 25 that results in *‘all Israel’* being saved. Paul has already explained that the situation of Gentiles coming in to the spiritual people of God is intended to make the unbelieving ethnic Israelites envious (verse 11), resulting in some of them turning to Christ and being saved (verse 14). The process of:

1. unbelieving ethnic Israelites being hardened,
2. some Gentiles coming in as a result of step 1, and
3. some of the unbelieving ethnic Israelites from step 1 coming in as a result of step 2

is the way in which God is saving *‘all Israel’*.”

This is Paul explaining the mystery of why God allowed so many Jews to reject Him. The gospel is the manner by which every person of every dispensation has been saved. This makes Paul’s next statement clear in the context.

**28Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the Good News, and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 29For God’s gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. 30Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the people of Israel rebelled against him, God was merciful to you instead. 31Now they are the rebels, and God’s mercy has come to you so that they, too, will share in God’s mercy. 32For God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone.**

God showed His favor and His love to Israel, they were set apart through the giving of the law and the covenants, through their rich history, through their relationship to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were even blessed to be the nation that Jesus (the deliverer) came from. That can never be taken away from them.

But they are not special in the manner that they have been saved in past generations and God is not going to make another way for them in the future. There is only one Way to be saved and it is open to Jew and Gentile alike right now. As Paul said in Romans 10:

**9If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. 11As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” 12Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

God loves all people. All people are or have rebelled against Him. And the mystery of this is that disobedience and rebellion of both Jews and Gentiles is what God uses to wake us up to our need for Him. Seems strange that God would use disobedience and rebellion to prepare us to put our faith in Him, but this is the mystery Paul is talking about. And he was talking about what was happening then and now. He was not talking about a future mass conversion of Jews he was talking about the way of salvation now, just God says:

**“At just the right time, I heard you.
    On the day of salvation, I helped you.”**

**Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation.**

**2 Corinthians 6:2**

If you are an ethnic Jew today is the day. If you are a Gentile, today is the day. And the mystery is that your rebellion is meant to lead you to your desperate need.

**33Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!**

**34For who can know the Lord’s thoughts?
    Who knows enough to give him advice?
35And who has given him so much
    that he needs to pay it back?**

**36For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.**