

The Salvation of the Nation Israel

📖 Romans 11:25-27

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Before we get into Romans 11:16-24 there was one question last week. Did Saul have faith prior to his conversion directly by Christ? I had mentioned Paul in Rom 11:13 where he stated that he magnified his ministry to the Gentiles. So to find the origin of his ministry to the Gentiles we briefly mentioned his conversion on the Road to Damascus in Acts 9. So the question is about the order of faith and conversion, whether faith precedes conversion or conversion precedes faith.

Q: Did Saul have faith prior to his conversion directly by Christ?

A: The short answer is that faith precedes conversion. Nobody has ever been directly converted by Christ before faith. Everybody has been converted by Christ after faith. But you do see these two orders float around in theology circles. The order that places conversion before faith is referred to as regeneration precedes faith. That is the view of Lordship Salvation. The other order places faith before conversion and is referred to as faith precedes regeneration. This is the view of Scripture. Unanimously Scripture testifies that faith precedes regeneration. Paul said in Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved..." The order is believe and be saved. He did not say "be saved and you will believe in the Lord Jesus." Saul definitely had faith on the Damascus Road prior to his conversion. His faith and conversion are reported in Acts 9, Acts 22 and Acts 26. Together these reports are a harmony. Together the picture is that Saul was on his way to Damascus with a group of men, letters in hand to arrest Jewish believers. About mid-day a bright light, brighter than the sun shone around him and all who were with him. They all fell to the ground and they all heard a voice but only Saul understood the voice. The voice spoke in the Hebrew dialect saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul then asked, "Who are you, Sir?" and the Sir said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." In Jewish theology this was a divine correction from heaven. Saul understood from the statement that he was being rebuked for resisting God. The expression "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" was a common rural metaphor for kicking against God. Just as a cattle's continued kicking would bring harm to itself so Paul's continued kicking against God would bring harm to himself. Saul understood that he was being corrected by God and he accepted the correction and believed in Jesus of Nazareth. It was at the moment he believed that he was converted or regenerated. Faith always precedes conversion or regeneration. Afterward

Saul was told to go into Damascus where he would be appointed to his task of apostleship and being blinded he was led in by the hand. So the answer is that Saul did have faith prior to his conversion.

If it is wondered why someone comes to faith, one comes to faith due to hearing the proclaimed word of the gospel (Rom 10:17) in conjunction with the work of the Spirit who convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). The proclaimed gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom 1:16). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the proclaimed word of Christ (Rom 10:17). As people hear the gospel they can resist it because of stubborn, rebellious hearts or they can consider it, learn and come to faith (John 6:45). But all that is necessary is that the word of the gospel be proclaimed and the Spirit convicts and the person hears it proclaimed and considers it and believes. It is not necessary to appeal to a mysterious work of God that is unspeakable because it is beyond history. Nor is it necessary to appeal to an eternal decree of God because it does not have explanatory power. What is necessary and does have explanatory power is it is the spoken word of God in conjunction with the Spirit of God which brings a person to faith in Jesus Christ. In that way Saul hearing Christ's voice on the Damascus Road is no different than our hearing Christ's voice in the Scriptures when it is read or proclaimed. The voice of Jesus on the Damascus Road is the same voice of Scripture and that voice is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. No one can be saved before they believe.

Last week we looked at Romans 11:16-24, the Olive Tree. We identified the root as Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham was holy because God set him apart by the Abrahamic Covenant. The natural branches are Isaac, Jacob and the nation Israel (individual Israelites) who came forth from Abraham. They are holy because God set them apart by confirming the Abrahamic Covenant to them. In other words, all Israelites were the natural branches of the olive tree whether they were believers or unbelievers. Then, when the seed of Abraham came some of the nation was broken off because they did not believe in Him. In the wake of their removal the wild branches who are Gentile believers were grafted in among them. We are holy because we are partakers of the rich spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. Since it is the Abrahamic Covenant that supports us we should not get arrogant toward the nation Israel for their unbelief. The spiritual blessings come from the Abrahamic Covenant, not from Gentile believers. So while it's true that in God's successive dealings some of the nation Israel were broken off from enjoying blessing under the covenant so that believing Gentiles might be grafted in, this should not lead to arrogance against Israel but fear of God, for if God did not spare the nation Israel from divine discipline for their unbelief then He will not spare us from divine discipline for arrogance against Israel. Gentile believers should take note of both the kindness and severity of God. As far as the nation Israel the severity of His discipline during this present age. As far as Gentile believers the kindness of enjoying spiritual blessing under the Abrahamic Covenant during this present age. And if we continue in His kindness by showing love to Israel through provoking them to jealousy then we can continue to enjoy blessing. Furthermore, if Israel does not continue in their unbelief they will be grafted back in to the place of blessing, for God is able to graft them back in again. Such a grafting back in is simple for God to do because if we as wild olive branches

were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree to enjoy spiritual blessing, how much more easily can God graft Israel, the natural branches back into their own olive tree?

How then do Gentile believers relate to the Abrahamic Covenant? Gentile believers are *partakers* of spiritual blessing that comes from the Abrahamic Covenant down through the New Covenant. We are not *over-takers* because a day will come when the fullness of the Gentiles has been grafted in and God will graft the nation Israel back into her own olive tree and fulfill all the physical and spiritual blessings outlined in the Abrahamic Covenant and its daughter covenants; the Land, the Davidic and the New. This fulfillment will take place when the nation Israel believes and the Messiah returns in His kingdom.

How should we respond to national Israel today in light of this truth and how have Gentiles fared for the last 2,000 years? Gentile believers have been forewarned not to become arrogant against the nation Israel. We should love the Jewish people. This is a critical truth because it has ethical consequences. Anyone who has studied church history knows that the Gentile dominated Church has not fared well when it came to the Jewish people. The early church understood that God still had a plan for Israel and that the Church had not replaced Israel. This is because they were literal in their interpretation of Israel's covenants and premillennial in their eschatology meaning that Christ would return before the prophesied kingdom on earth and fulfill Israel's covenants. However, when the second coming of Christ and kingdom did not precipitate in their lifetime Gentiles began to rethink this question. Near the end of the 2nd century Justin Martyr had written that the Church had replaced Israel. This position was then buttressed by the allegorizing method of interpretation of Origen in the 3rd century and later in the 4th century by Augustine. This method of interpretation led Augustine to conclude that the Church had replaced Israel as the kingdom of God. He thus rejected premillennialism and amillennialism became the predominant eschatology. Amillennial means "no millennium" in the sense envisioned by premillennialism, of a kingdom on earth and a restored nation Israel. They viewed Christ's kingdom rule allegorically as through the saints in heaven or in the hearts of His saints on earth or both. This allegorical method was the basis for the Roman Catholic Church which soon envisioned the kingdom as Christ's rule through the successors of Peter in the papacy and the priestly hierarchy. Since the kingdom was being realized now through the Church there was no room left for a future restoration of national Israel. All this resulted in a negative attitude toward the Jews who became known as "the Christ-killers." The Roman Catholic Church reigned for the entire 1,000 years of the Middle Ages and the Jews were incessantly persecuted under the banner of the cross. When the time of the Reformation came the early reformer Martin Luther was initially ambivalent to the Jews but later antagonistic. He wrote a tract called *The Jews and their Lies*. His antagonism was a result of inheriting the allegorical method of interpretation from the Roman Catholic Church that resulted in the Church being the kingdom of God and the aberrant amillennial eschatology. The Reformation resulted in three groups, Lutheran, Reformed and Anabaptist. The Reformed strain has been the most prolific at breeding anti-Semitism in the wider Protestant Church along with the Roman Catholic Church with less influence from Lutheran strains. The Anabaptist strain returned to the early church's literal interpretation of Scripture and

resulted in premillennialism, eventually distinguishing Israel from the Church and seeing a future return of Christ rescuing Israel and establishing His kingdom on earth. Some Lutheran strains also returned to a literal interpretation of Scripture and premillennialism, notably such 19th century authors as George N. H. Peters, Leroy Edwin Froom and Joseph Seiss who wrote a famous premillennial commentary on the Apocalypse were all Lutheran. And today there's this division within evangelicalism over Israel and you have most hanging on to mainline, historic tradition that the Church is Israel, God can save Jews but God doesn't have a future for the nation Israel. Then you have Christian Zionism and Christian Zionism teaches that evangelicals should support the nation Israel because God loves the nation Israel even in unbelief, for the sake of the fathers, and has given them by grace divine title to the Land of Israel even in unbelief as a preparatory measure for restoring them to the Land in the kingdom to come. This is true Christian Zionism. *Christian Zionism is not first about Israel but first about God, because God made covenants to Israel, nor is it even second about Israel but second about Christ because Christ is the covenanted King of Israel, then and only then it is about Israel such that when all Israel receives her King then her covenanted King and kingdom will come.* Romans 11 supports this belief very obviously for one not interpreting Scripture according to the allegorical method and the resulting amillennial eschatology.

Today we come to 11:25 and Paul is continuing to instruct Gentile believers. He had begun addressing us in 11:13 when he said, "But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles..." All of these verses are addressed to us Gentiles. He says in v 25, **For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."** Paul is here trying to cut off possible arrogance against of believing Gentiles against the nation Israel. To do this he says, **I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed.** The Greek word **uninformed** means "ignorant." Paul does not want us to be ignorant about a certain truth. Paul says ignorant **of this mystery**. What is a mystery? The Greek word is *μυστηριον*. It does not refer to a mystery in the sense of mysterious. It refers to something previously unrevealed, now revealed. So it is some truth hidden in God until He revealed it through apostles or prophets. Here it is a truth that God kept hidden until He revealed it to the apostle Paul who discloses it to us. The reason is set forth **so that you will not be wise in your own estimation**. Without this truth we could become wise in our own estimation. We could think more highly of our place in the plan of God and of our understanding of the plan of God. The obvious conclusion we might draw is that we are over-takers of Israel's covenants and have therefore replaced Israel in the covenant plan of God. The mystery is then defined clearly—**that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**. This was a truth that was not revealed in the OT. In the OT the prophets predicted that the Messiah would come and both suffer and reign in glory. They saw that these were distinct emphases of Messiah's ministry but they did not see that they were to be fulfilled in two comings of Messiah. And the time between the two comings is a mystery age or dispensation. One of the mystery truths of that age is the one Paul reveals here, **that a partial hardening**

has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. The expression **partial hardening** views the nation Israel as a whole and how part are hardened and part are softened and that distinction is based on those who are in unbelief and those who are in belief and the two groups are the non-remnant and the remnant. As we learned from 11:1-10 God always has a remnant of believing Jews.

Now this mystery has been revealed so we should not think ourselves so wise in thinking that we Gentiles are over-takers of Israel's covenants and have replaced them in the covenant plan of God. Oh, no. This state of affairs was unknown, in that it was not predicted by the prophets, and so we are temporarily partaking of spiritual blessings of Israel's covenants. Paul says it will only remain **until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** He uses the temporal adverb *αχρι* to make clear that this is a temporary situation.

The temporary situation will come to a close when **the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** What is **the fullness of the Gentiles?** The **fullness of the Gentiles** refers to the full *number of...Gentiles* who are to be a part of the Church. The Church is composed of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ but the completion of the Church is gauged by when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. We see then that the Church is not on a calendar of time but a calendar of people. The church comes to completion when a certain number of Gentiles have come to salvation. What this means is that one cannot start date setting. Anyone who date sets thinks that the numbers in the book of Daniel can apply to the Church. The most famous numbers are the 2,300 days of Dan 8:14 which refer to literal days of the Temple's desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes and the 70 sevens of Dan 9:24-27 which refer to 490 years until Israel is restored to her kingdom. The calendar of Dan 9 is explicitly stated to be for Daniel's people, Israel, and for Daniel's city, Jerusalem. The Church is not in the 483 years that came to an end at the cross and it is not in the last seven years of that will start in the future either. The Church is being built in between the 483rd and 484th years on Israel's calendar of time. This means that the timing of the church's completion cannot be calculated. No one can set dates without being wrong. Lots of people set dates. Lots of people make money off of setting dates. But no one can set any dates. The Church is not on a calendar of time but on a calendar of people, and particularly Gentiles. When the last Gentile comes into the Church the fullness of the Gentiles will have come and the Church will be complete. This is why Paul in verse 13 magnified his ministry as an apostle of Gentiles. He realized that every Gentile that comes to salvation in the Jewish Messiah is one person closer to the fullness of the Gentiles. And with that fullness Paul realized that the period of part of Israel being hardened would come to an end and 11:26 would take place, **and so all Israel will be saved.** It is clear then that when **the** last Gentile has come into the Church the hardness of part of Israel will be removed so that what was only a remnant of believing Jews will then come to coincide with the entire nation of Israel, not instantaneously but according to the prophetic outline given elsewhere in Scripture. When the text says **all Israel** it means the nation Israel. The word nation is the most important word to include.

It is not sufficient to say as many do that God has a plan for Israel. That is far too weak. One may say that and mean spiritual Israel, which they identify as the Church. This comes from the false concept that there is only one

people of God. By this Israel is the Church in the NT and the Israel of God in the NT is the Church. This interpretation rejects any national significance to Paul's statement but has serious problems. Take for example the famous Greek grammarian A. T. Robertson's comment on verse 26, "The immediate context (use of *πας* [*pās*] in contrast with *πο μερους, πληρωμα* [*apo merous, plērōma*] here in contrast with *πληρωμα* [*plērōma*] in verse 12) argues for the Jewish people "as a whole." But the spiritual Israel (both Jews and Gentiles) may be his idea in accord with 9:6 (Gal. 6:16) as the climax of the argument."¹ In other words he doesn't know what to do with this because if Paul means what the immediate context argues for, the "whole" of Israel or national Israel, then in his mind that contradicts Rom 9:6 and Gal 6:16 which he interprets to refer to the Church as spiritual Israel. But both of those passages have been shown to be better interpreted as referring to a believing remnant of Israel within the Church and not the entire Church, both Jew and Gentile. The point is that this interpretation that avoids national Israel is not going far enough. Barry Horner, a Reformed theologian who graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary, which is traditionally amillennial, is remarkably candid when he says this about the verse, "Israel" here refers to a future national conversion of Israel...It is the obvious meaning that is also in full harmony with a Judeo-centric eschatology."² The only thing that makes it not obvious to people is their defective amillennial eschatology. That blinds them to what is child's play in the text. **All Israel** means **all Israel**, national Israel, ethnic Israel. Of all 68 uses of Israel in the NT each and every one, 68, refer to national, ethnic Israel. This means plainly that God has a future for national Israel. To say otherwise is severely defective eschatology. The reason there is a visible nation Israel today since 1948 is because God is preparing to save all Israel in the future.

This salvation is prophesied by the OT. In other words, this was not a mystery. Paul says, **just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."** ²⁷**"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."** The quote is closely aligned to Isa 59:20-21 and more loosely coming from Jer 31:33-34, Ps 14:7 and 53:6. There are four expressions that should be analyzed for the whole picture. First, the OT predicted that the **DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION. THE DELIVERER** is Messianic title that describes His work of rescuing Israel. The location from which He **WILL COME** to rescue them is **ZION**. This is not the earthly **Zion** but the heavenly **Zion**. When Messiah comes He descends from heavenly **Zion** to earth. This is the Second Coming as described in Rev 19. Israel will be gathered at Bozrah in Edom and under imminent destruction by the anti-Christ and his armies. But their calling on Him to be saved will result in the Messiah returning to Bozrah and rescuing them from their enemies.

Second, **HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB**. The mention of **JACOB** indicates the entire nation Israel since **JACOB** was renamed Israel. He was thus, both an individual and a nation. **THE DELIVERER**, who is the Messiah, **WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS** from the nation Israel. **UNGODLINESS** is typically used of "false worship" (cf Rom 1:18). The nation Israel is currently involved in "false worship." In that day the **DELIVERER WILL REMOVE** that false worship from them so that they worship only the Messiah.

Third, **THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM.** WHAT COVENANT? The **COVENANT** that God made that would remove false worship from the nation Israel is the new covenant. This central text predicting the new covenant is Jer 31:31-34 but there are several other OT texts, Isa 59:20-21 to be sure. It is a specification of the worldwide blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was made with the nation Israel and so can only be fulfilled to and through the nation Israel. Jer 31:31, "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Since the house of Israel was the northern kingdom and the house of Judah the southern kingdom then it is apparent that this covenant is made with the nation Israel as a whole. It was ratified by Christ's blood shed on the cross in the Gospels. At the Last Passover in the Upper Room, Jesus said in Luke 22:20, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." On the cross Jesus was shedding His blood which is the blood of the new covenant. There is no other blood to be shed. Jesus did it once for all. Those who believe in Him enjoy the spiritual benefits of the blood of the new covenant. This makes us partakers not over-takers. Heb 10:19-22, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Spiritual blessings from a covenant can be enjoyed by those who are not parties to the covenant, such as believers in the present age. This is what it means to be a partaker. But a covenant can only be fulfilled to the parties of the covenant and that party is Israel and so fulfillment remains in the future. That is what Paul is referring to here when he says of the nation Israel, **THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM.** What is clear is that **THEM** is the nation Israel and the new covenant will be fulfilled to the nation Israel in the future.

Fourth, **WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.** The word **WHEN** is a temporal adverb. The covenant will be fulfilled at a particular time in history. One of the provisions of the new covenant is that he will **TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.** This has not been fulfilled in any sense today though all who believe enjoy their sins being taken away as partakers. God has not taken away the nation Israel's **SINS.** When He does it will mean that they have believed in Jesus as the Messiah and so their **SINS** will be removed from them at that time, as far as the east is from the west I will remove their sins from them, thus says the Lord. I will wash them whiter than snow. At that time Israel will come into the full and total forgiveness of sins and fulfillment of God's covenants with them in the kingdom on earth ruled by the Messiah from David's earthly throne from thenceforth and forevermore. If anyone doubts this it is God who says, **THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.**

It is therefore a most vile view to think that God will not do this for the nation Israel. This is His covenant. It means everything to Him. He has spoken. He will do it. It is basic and yet the historic, traditional view of the church has denied this and said this is for the church, the church is spiritual Israel and hence the track record of the Church's treatment of Israel has been not good. I mean the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and most Lutheran churches, all of them.

I want to conclude by allowing you to listen to a brief interview with Barry Horner about why this is so important. This has ethical consequences. Horner spent ten years researching this book called *Future Israel*. What is so interesting about this guy is that he's a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary. And this seminary is not exactly on board with Israel. But this guy was a pastor out of that seminary and he saw the results of their bad eschatology and he studied the Scriptures and he came to our view, which is Paul's view, which is Jesus' view. The interviewer is asking him why in the world he spent 10 years researching and writing this book. Listen to what he has to say.

Video: [Why did Barry Horner write the Book "Future Israel"?](#)

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ro 11:26.

² Barry Horner, *Future Israel*, p 260.