

# The Mercy of God

📖 Romans 11:28-32

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Last time we studied Rom 11:25-27 and there was one question that we want to field.

**Q: How are we to understand Zech 13:8, 9, as it relates to “all Israel” in Rom 11:26. See Charles Ryrie’s note on Zech 13:8, 9.**

**A:** If you have a Ryrie’s Study Bible you might look at his particular view of Zech 13:8-9 and how he ties that in with Rom 11:26. The difficulty is if you go one verse earlier and include verse 7, Zech 13:7-9 deals with events related to both the first and second comings of Christ and so somewhere in those verses there is a gap of time. Zech 13 verse 7 deals with the first coming when the Shepherd was smitten which can be no other than the crucifixion of the Messiah, verse 8 deals with two-thirds of Israel being killed and one-third being spared, and verse 9 deals with the one-third being brought by God through the refiner’s fire and proven true such that they call upon Him at the second coming. It’s difficult to be dogmatic about the passage since we only know in hindsight that the coming of the Messiah is in two parts with a gap of time in between. Jesus demonstrated in Luke 4 that certain OT passages could be divided into two parts. He did this by teaching that Isa 61:1-2a was fulfilled at His first coming but that Isaiah 61:2bff was not yet fulfilled and so will be fulfilled at His second coming. So we know for certain that OT passages can be split but we don’t have divine omniscience so we don’t always know exactly where they are supposed to be split. In the Zech 13 context there is disagreement. David Baron sees the split somewhere within 13:8 so that the two-thirds and one-third were primarily historic but with some foreshadowing or application to the future.<sup>1</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum saw the split between Zech 13:7 and 8 and as a description of the anti-Christ killing 2/3 of Israel during the Tribulation period. In his view the Jews that remain at the return of Christ will be “all Israel” in Rom 11:26.<sup>2</sup> Charles Ryrie also sees the split between Zech 13:7 and 8 but as a description of God killing 2/3 of living Israel after the Tribulation during the 75-day interval before the Kingdom begins. The Jews who remain after the interval are the “all Israel” of Rom 11:26.<sup>3</sup> These differences among good commentators of Scripture show how difficult some prophetic passages are to unfold. Personally, I agree with Ryrie and Fruchtenbaum that the split is between Zech 13:7 and 8 but I view the details of the passage a little differently. I would say that the two-thirds and one-third refer only to Jews living in the land during the second half of the Tribulation and not to Jews living all over the world. When Christ returns Matt

24:31 teaches that Jews from all over the world will be gathered by angels and Ezekiel 20:33-38 adds that they will be judged outside the land and Matt 25:29 adds that those not prepared with salvation will be judged and killed (Matt 24:29). The Jews remaining will be the "all Israel" of Rom 11:26 and will be taken into the Land and their covenants. This is most similar to Ryrie's view but with some differences.

Returning to our text of Romans 11. Last time we looked at verse 25 where Paul says "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery." By "brethren" Paul is referring to Gentile believers. Paul did not want Gentile believers to be uninformed about a particular truth referred to as a "mystery." A mystery is a truth that was unrevealed in the OT because it was hidden in God and now revealed in the NT. It is important for Gentiles to be informed of this mystery so that we do not become conceited against Israel. The mystery is that there is a partial hardness that has happened to Israel due to their unbelief in the Messiah. This mystery has two parts. First, the hardness refers to their insensitivity and dullness to the Messiahship of Jesus. Second, the hardness is only temporary. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in then verse 26 says "all Israel will be saved." This refers to the national salvation of Israel. Paul does not go into any details of how all Israel will be saved such as the two-thirds being killed and the one third being spared or the judgment of living Israel when Christ returns during the 75-day interval but he just focuses on the end result that all Israel will be saved in close connection with the Second Advent. In 11:27, at that time God will fulfill the new covenant with them when He takes away their sins.

We come to Rom 11:28 and Paul is getting near to the end of his argument concerning Israel past, present and future. He gives us some more good points to think about in his defense of Israel and the covenants. He says, **From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.** Paul wants us to remember two things when we look at the nation Israel. There are two vantage points of looking at Israel. First, we may look at the nation Israel **from the standpoint of the gospel**. The **gospel** is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose again. From that standpoint the nation Israel rejected the gospel. Because of this **they are enemies**. They are not our enemies but they are God's enemies. The **gospel** is God's good news but Israel rejected God's good news so they are God's enemies. But Paul says they are His enemies **for our sakes**. In other words, if they had not rejected the **gospel** then there would be no Gentile salvation. There was a genuine offer of the gospel to the nation Israel and they could have believed but because they rejected it the gates of salvation have been opened to Gentiles. Now there is a great time of Gentile salvation. We are supposed to be impressed that God in His sovereignty is able to use the nation Israel's rejection of the gospel for the benefit of Gentiles. In other words, God used a negative choice to bring about a positive effect. So the first thing we should remember when we look at the nation Israel is that with respect to the gospel they are enemies of God but this is for our benefit because it opened the door for our salvation.

Second, we should look at the nation Israel **from the standpoint of God's choice**, or better, from the standpoint of being the choice or chosen nation. In other words, the nation Israel is the only nation with whom God made a covenant. God made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation Israel. Paul traced this covenant line in Rom 9 when he said, "they are not all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but through Isaac your descendants will be named...and not only this...just as it is written "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." This makes Israel God's choice nation. Viewed **from this standpoint** Paul says **they are beloved**. In other words, it doesn't matter what they have done. It is not about what they have done. It is about what God has done which is make a covenant with them. The Greek word **beloved** is *αγαπητος* and refers to "a very special relationship," such as one has with an only son, "one who is prized, highly valued." The nation Israel is specially prized by God because He made a covenant with them, or as Paul says, they are **beloved** by God **for the sake of the fathers**. So Israel also fell short of the glory of God, but Israel is specially prized for the sake of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He decided of His own sovereign will to make a covenant with them and their offspring. And if you think about it, this is saying nothing more than what Paul already said in 11:16 where he said, "if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too." What Paul meant was that if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are holy because they are set apart by the Abrahamic covenant then the nation Israel that descended from them is also holy because they are set apart by the Abrahamic covenant.

So the two things we are to remember in verse 28 are, first, that even though they are enemies of God because they rejected the gospel, if they had not then the gateway of salvation would not have opened for us and second, they are still God's covenant people valued highly by Him because He has a very special relationship with the fathers of that nation.

Therefore it is very clear that we are not to think of the nation Israel as "the Christ-killers" or as a people that has been eternally cast off or as a proper object of our indignation as much as Christendom has thought. The people of Israel have suffered greatly at the hands of the Gentile Church and this is a great tragedy and failure to heed a direct warning in Scripture.

In 11:29 Paul gives further explanation of the special place of Israel. **For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable**. The word that is emphatic in the Greek sentence is **irrevocable**, it comes first in the sentence. This Greek word is *αμεταμελητα* and it means "without regret, without remorse."<sup>4</sup> It is saying that God is not remorseful about **the gifts and calling of** the nation Israel even though they rejected His gospel and did not live up to His expectations. It is interesting that God did not regret it because in Gen 6 it says "The Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth." That statement was made to express God's extreme displeasure with the corruption of man and nature before the Flood. But God does not regret **the gifts and calling** on the nation Israel even though they rejected His gospel and did not live up to His expectations.

What are **the gifts** that God gave the nation Israel? The word **gifts** is *χαρισμα*. It's a plural, of course, and refers to "grace gifts," gifts freely bestowed apart from merit. What grace gifts did God freely bestow on the nation Israel?

Turn to Rom 3:1. There are nine things listed explicitly in Romans that God freely bestowed on the nation Israel alone. Here is the beginning of this list. In 3:1, "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." The first gift is the Scriptures, the oracles of God. The Scriptures were entrusted to the Jews. The Scriptures are a great gift because in them are the words of life. They did nothing to merit this gift. They received them freely because God wanted to give them the Scriptures. Paul doesn't list the second gift here but in Romans 9:4-5 he continues the list. This is one reason that Rom 9-11 is not a later addition to the Book of Romans but really a continuation of his argument in Rom 3 and 8. In 9:4 Paul gives the second gift, "to whom belongs the adoption as sons," which refers to their adoption out of Egypt "and the glory" the third gift, which refers to the Shekinah Glory which stayed with them as a reminder of God's presence with them, another great free gift, "and the covenants" refers to the Abrahamic, the Land, the Davidic and the New, more great gifts because they are all grace covenants depending for their fulfillment on God alone, "and the giving of the Law" refers to that given at Mt Sinai, another great gift to keep them separate from the nations and to point to the Messiah, "and the temple service" refers to the temple and its priests, another great gift because through them they could be restored to fellowship with God, "and the promises" refers to the Messianic promises, more great gifts so as to help identify the Messiah when He came, "whose are the fathers" referring to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever," refers to the greatest grace gift of all, Jesus, the Messiah who is God Himself. Rom 3 and 9 recount the grace gifts, the *χαρισμα* that God freely bestowed on this nation and this nation only. They are all free gifts unmerited by any word, thought or deed. And these gifts Paul says God does not regret giving to them even though they did not attain to the great end of these grace gifts which was to believe in their Messiah when He came to them and offered Himself (Rom 10:4).

The second thing that God does not regret in 11:29 is **calling** the nation Israel. The word **calling** is the Greek word *κλησις* and refers to being "invited to experience a special privilege and responsibility."<sup>5</sup> What they were being invited into as God's covenant people was to be a kingdom of priests that mediated between the nations and God, and to be a holy nation, a nation set apart to reveal the truths about God to all the nations through the Scriptures. In short they were called into the unique privilege of being a light to all nations of the one true God and His Messiah who brings salvation to the world. This was their calling and their privilege and it carried with it a responsibility in history. And yet even though they did not fulfill their calling in history God does not regret calling them for this task.

In 11:30, 31 and 32 Paul explains that God did not regret giving them the gifts and unique calling because it worked toward His sovereign purposes for history which involves showing mercy to both Jew and Gentile in successive dispensations or administrations. What we have here in a nutshell is God's philosophy of history. His philosophy is at variance with the humanistic philosophies of history that involve a meaningless, cyclical direction toward some ultimate doom of ice or fire because it is rooted in the impersonal evolutionary paradigm. God's philosophy of history is that it is full of meaning, involving cyclical patterns but moving directionally

toward a final eternal kingdom. These verses clarify how God has decided to establish a citizenry for that kingdom that is representative of both Jews and Gentiles. The first part of verse 30 directs our attention to the Gentiles who during Israel's being in the place of blessing in the OT lived in disobedience to God. Paul states it simply, **For just as you were disobedient to God.** That period of **disobedience** refers to the entire period starting in the post-Flood world until the Cross. During this period Gentiles as a group did not walk with God, nor were they very interested in the things of God, though they could be saved, but they **were** generally **disobedient to God.** The word **disobedient** is *απειθω* and means "to not believe and thus to disobey." The Gentile world from the Flood until the Cross was characterized as not believing and so disobeying. This characteristic is a repeating or cyclical element in history but progressing toward a kingdom as we will see. The second part of verse 30 refers to Gentiles being shown mercy by God through Israel's disobedience. Paul simply says, **But now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience.** The word **now** signals progression in God's plan for history and is a directional element. The word **disobedience** has the article and refers to the unpardonable sin. That generation committed the unpardonable sin, which is an indication of extreme unbelief that resulted in the disobedience of the crucifixion of their Messiah. So in view is Israel's unbelief and thus disobedience. The word translated **because** is instrumental and so should be translated as "by" or "through" in order to show that God's plan to show mercy to Gentiles was accomplished through Israel's unbelief and rejection of their Messiah. In other words, while it is difficult to understand, God's plan always involved Israel's rejection but that does not mean that God caused them to reject. Israel's offer of salvation and the kingdom in Messiah was a legitimate offer that they chose to reject. In light of that rejection God brought about the next phase of His plan which is to **show mercy** to Gentiles. So God has a plan and God is able to work over and through human choices in order to bring about His plan.

In verse 31 **so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. these also** who **have been disobedient** refers to the nation Israel in the present. Presently they do not believe and are thus **disobedient.** This **disobedience** began with the national rejection of their Messiah. Each generation that continues to reject Him is committing the same disobedience. But this has happened so that we might be shown mercy and through us that they too may be shown mercy. In other words, once more, God has a future for the nation Israel and that future is one of showing them **mercy.** If they did not have disobedience then mercy would not be possible because mercy is not giving someone what they deserve. The nation Israel rejected their Messiah and deserves eternal punishment but God is not going to give them what they deserve. He is going to give them mercy!

So the movement is from Gentiles disobedience to being shown mercy and then to Israel's disobedience to being shown mercy. This is the structure of world history and it is described here with instrumental cases meaning that the way God is driving history is by means of rejections by one group in order to bring blessing to another so that all are shown mercy. Witmer says, "When the Gentiles rejected God and disobeyed Him (1:17–21), God chose Abraham and his descendants as His special people. Now the disobedience of the Jews enables

God to show mercy to the Gentiles. Then, when that purpose is achieved, He will again show mercy to Israel corporately.”<sup>6</sup>

Verse 32 is this great summary truth (cf also Rom 3:9; Gal 3:22), **For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.** This is a strong statement on the purpose of God’s dispensational arrangement of history. Through working with Jews for thousands of years and then with Gentiles God is able to **shut up all**, both Jews and Gentiles **in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.** God is interested in showing mercy to both segments of the human race, Jews and Gentiles. History is chiefly theocentric, about God, it is not chiefly about man or about salvation. It is about God, to teach all men, Jew and Gentile about God and here, that He is a merciful God. Again, mercy means not giving one what they deserve. God set up history so that during one phase Gentiles got what they deserved and during another phase they did not get what they deserved and He is doing the same thing with the Jews. This way everyone gets to enjoy God’s mercy. It is the chief end of God to show off who and what He is, what He is like, that is, to demonstrate His glory by putting Himself on display before the world with all His splendid attributes.

To show His mercy there would be a period when Gentiles were shut up in disobedience. The word **shut up** means “captured in a net.” Gentiles were for a period of history captured in a net of disobedience and hence not deserving of anything but punishment, but God did that **so that He** could **show mercy** to them. Then the Jews went into a period when they were captured in a net of disobedience and hence not deserving of anything but punishment, but God did this **so that He** could **show mercy** to them too. To deny that God has a future for the nation Israel is to deny that He will show mercy to the nation Israel. That is a misrepresentation of God and a dangerous theological error that leads to ethical errors of anti-Semitism. We cannot guard ourselves too carefully against the ubiquitous propaganda against Israel under the pretense of justice and apartheid. The world is under the power of the evil one and they propagate and promulgate these lies and deceit. The Church would do well to dismiss these false allegations and hold close to the God of mercy as Paul exhorts. Salvation is of the Jews and apart from their rejection of the gospel there is no Gentile salvation. We are therefore indebted to them and to the mercy of God.

In summary, in 11:28 Paul says we should look at the nation Israel from two standpoints. First, from the standpoint of the gospel they are the enemies of God because they rejected the gospel. But this was for our sake because if they had not rejected then the gateway to our salvation would never have been opened. Second, from the standpoint of election into the covenant position they are still beloved by God because He has a very special relationship with the fathers of that nation and that relationship extends to the whole nation. In 11:29 the reasoning is set forth that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” or without regret. Even though they rejected God did not regret giving them the grace gifts mentioned in Rom 3 and 9 and even though He called them into a special position of privilege and responsibility to be a light to all nations and they failed He did not regret it. This worked toward His sovereign purposes. Whatever man does works ultimately to God’s sovereign

purposes. In 11:30 Paul explains this, "For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy." God's sovereign purpose worked out through human choices of disobedience are to show mercy to Gentiles and Jews in a successive arrangement of history that is going to a definite end in His kingdom on earth. In 11:32 Paul summarizes by saying that He shut up all in the tangled net of disobedience so that He may have an opportunity to show mercy to all, so that all men might be saved. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. And God does not wish that any would perish but for all to come to repentance. This repentance is a change of mind about the Jewish Messiah that is joined with faith in Him, for salvation is of the Jews.

What can we learn? One interesting lesson is that from the human standpoint there is no time of Gentile salvation unless Israel rejected her Messiah. If Israel had received their Messiah then the kingdom would have come. This means that the kingdom offer through Israel's Messiah was a genuine offer. Israel in a genuine sense could have received her Messiah. However, at the same time God has a plan for history that involves their rejection of the Messiah. But His planning it does not at all mean that He caused it or worked it or is responsible for it in any way. The word plan or God's plan has a different denotation than our concept of planning. Israel alone was responsible for their rejection and this rejection was in the face of more than adequate divine influence for them to receive Him. The problem was they were not willing. This is another example showing that history involves true human choices and yet God works over and through human choices to bring His sovereign plan for history to pass. The question today is, are you willing, are you willing to trust in Jesus as the Savior of the world. He who believes in Him will not be disappointed.

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<sup>1</sup> "...though the fulfilment may not be entirely *limited* to it, yet, that the reference is chiefly to the judgments which would come on the people *in the land*, namely immediately after the "smiting of the Shepherd," while they were yet recognised as a nation in Palestine...and again after the restoration of a representative remnant in unbelief at the end of the long parenthetical period, when God's national dealings with them shall be resumed, and His long controversy with them as a nation on account of their great sin finally settled *on the same soil* where it originated." David Baron, *Zechariah: A Commentary on His Visions and Prophecies*, p 483.

<sup>2</sup> "Under the fierce persecution of the Antichrist, controlled and energized by Satan, two-thirds of the Jewish population will die." Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, p 285.

<sup>3</sup> "God's judgment of Israel at the return of Christ will weed out all but one-third of them. These will constitute the "all Israel" that will then be saved (Rom. 11:26)." Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1475.

<sup>4</sup> BDAG, p 53.

<sup>5</sup> BDAG, p 549.

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<sup>6</sup> John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 486.