



Romans 11:23-32
“All Israel will be Saved”

23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,

31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.

32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

If there is any book that I wish Paul had written, it would be an inspired commentary on his letter to the Romans. That way whenever we had a question about what Paul really meant, all we would have to do is turn to the commentary and we'd have the solution. Think about it, no more arguments about baptism, about justification, election, and host of other subjects. And it would have made writing this sermon so much easier, because this is one of the most argued over chapters in the entire letter.

Now some of the opinions about what Paul means here are easy to dismiss based on the clear teaching of the scriptures elsewhere. For instance those who, like John Hagee think that this chapter means that all Jews will be saved and that **“trying to convert Jews is a waste of time. Jews already have a covenant with God and that has never been replaced by Christianity”** are wrong. That would overturn the entire teaching of Romans. Paul has been laboring to show that all are condemned under sin and that it is by faith alone in Jesus Christ, not ethnicity that all men are saved, or as Paul puts in his central statement in Romans 1:16-17 **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith.””**

But even within the Reformed community, there are two major opinions about this section, Leon Morris sums them and their strengths up very well when he says the following:

“Some commentators see in this a vision of the time at the end of the age when the whole nation of Israel will turn to Christ and enter the salvation for which he died. They point out that throughout this section of the epistle Paul is concerned with the nation, and specifically they see no good reason for seeing a difference of meaning in "Israel" in verses 25 and 26. So they see Paul as looking forward to a glorious time when the Jews, as a nation, will turn to Christ. There may be some individuals who will not respond to the gospel, but the nation as a whole will become Christian. Others insist that Paul has been giving special attention to the "remnant" throughout the discussion until now, and they ask on what grounds we should hold that Paul thought that the last generation on earth before Christ comes again would be treated differently from all the others. They also hold firmly that "all Israel" is a curious way of referring to most of the last generation, after many, many generations have died outside Christ. Should not "all Israel" have something to say about these generations? They see in "Israel" accordingly a reference to the true people of God and thus to elect Jews in all generations including the last. While both positions are held very firmly, it cannot be said that either has been able to bring forward an argument so decisive that it makes the position of the other untenable. It is clear that we must examine what Paul says with great care.” – Leon Morris

As a result, this is one of those areas of scripture where as Morris puts it, I need to speak with great care. There are areas of Romans where I can say this is what I know Paul means, such as Romans 3 and Romans 9, but here I need to make it clear that this is what I *think* Paul means and that my interpretation is far from infallible.

It sometimes happens that as I am studying and preparing to preach on a section of scripture, my own views about their meaning change, and I have to tell you that is what happened here, I don't mean that my views have shifted from Reformed to Dispensational, but I have moved from agreeing with the interpretation of men like Calvin and Robertson to agreeing with men like Charles Hodge, Willhelmus A'Brakel and John Murray. Some would say that this means I've shifted from the classic Amillennial interpretation of these verses to the classic Postmillennial interpretation, but to tell the truth I'm just trying to be consistent with what I think the bible is teaching here. So what is Paul teaching?

Well he tells us in verse 25, that he does not want us to remain ignorant, which is his way of saying I want you to know, and then he describes what he is about to tell us as a “mystery.” Now when he says **MYSTERY** he doesn't mean a mystery in terms of a mystery novel or show. There you have a crime and then clues, often cryptic, that will help you to solve it. And then the writer gives us a brilliant but quirky detective like Sherlock Holmes, who can put all the pieces of the puzzle together, and then when he's done that and we (usually personified by poor old Dr. Watson) say “How the Devil did you know” he answers in patronizing fashion “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Paul is not saying this is something I figured it out, and if you were only as clever as I am you could have as well. He's saying this is something hidden, something like the gospel, something that no one, not even the angels would have expected, and the only way we *can* know is that God has revealed it!

Now this mystery is “that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” But what does that mean?

First what does he mean by ISRAEL, that's going to be incredibly important for this whole section:

When the word Israel is used in the New Testament, it can have one of two meanings.

- 1) It can mean *Ethnic Israel*, that is those who are the physical descendents of Abraham and even more importantly Jacob, who was renamed Israel, from who the 12 tribes came.
- 2) Or it can be used to indicate SPIRITUAL ISRAEL that is the full number of the elect, both Jews and Gentiles who will be redeemed, Paul uses it that way for instance in Gal. 6:15-16 where he has been speaking of the church: "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*"

It does not mean the modern political nation of Israel established in 1948.

Heb. 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The fact that the word *Israel isn't* being used to indicate geography in Chapter 11 is reinforced by the fact that Paul in giving evidence that God hasn't cast off his people speaks of himself as "an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." In verse 1, and yet Paul wasn't born in Israel, he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia. And I think we forget that today the majority of Jews don't live in Israel. The nation with the most ethnic Jews in it, is America, and if things keep going the way they are, America may become the only safe place on earth for them.

Next, Blindness in part doesn't mean that all ethnic Jews had become partly blinded or hardened to the gospel. Since Paul had been talking before about the remnant that had believed, of which he and the apostles and the church in Jerusalem were all representatives, it can't mean that all Jews were partly hardened, rather it means that part of the Jews, the majority in fact, had been blinded to the Gospel. Their understanding was veiled, they would not believe it. In fact, to this day, some of the hardest people on earth to evangelize are Jews. Their reaction to the gospel is very hostile, and they view Jewish converts to Christianity with utter contempt. When I became an evangelical Christian, my parents thought it was weird, but unlike many Jewish parents they didn't say I was dead to them or "worse than Hitler." And speaking to Jewish converts, I've found that is an almost universal reaction.

That blindness, Paul says, will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in. Then it will be taken away. Until that time, Jews will read Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and all of the many places in the Old Testament and refuse to see Jesus Christ spoken of in them. But some day, that veil will be lifted in a manner similar to 2 Cor. 3:14 where Paul writes: "***But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.***"

When that happens All Israel will be saved. Paul says will be saved. Now what does Paul mean by Israel here? That's critical, is it *Spiritual Israel* or *Ethnic Israel*? I believe it is Ethnic Israel, for a number of reasons:

First, it's not Spiritual Israel that is blinded in part

Second, there is a balance here, Paul makes it clear that it is the Jews who have been cut off, who will be grafted back in, and that is ethnic Israel, not Spiritual Israel

Third, the small number of Jews in the remnant who have been saved and joined the church is not a mystery, that's the normal course of redemption. As Leon Morris puts it: "*Now it is no mystery that all the elect, Jews as well as Gentiles will be saved. Nor is the conversion of a few Jews in each generation such as has happened till now the kind of thing that needs to be the subject of special Revelation.*"

But wait, someone says, Paul says ALL Israel will be saved in verse 26 and clearly ALL ethnic Jews haven't been saved, the bible makes clear that many like Judas and Esau and Dathan and Korah and Abiram are already in Hell. But all seldom if ever means EVERY SINGLE ONE in the bible. I can give you some quick examples of that:

Luke 3:15 – all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not,

John 3:26 – “behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

John 8:2 – Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.

Acts 22:15 – 15 'For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

2 Cor. 3:2 – “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;”

A.W. Pink helps us to understand these uses of ALL: “In none of the above passages has "all," "all men," "all the people" an unlimited scope. In each of those passages these general terms have only a relative meaning. In Scripture "all" is used in two ways: meaning "all without exception" (occurring infrequently), and "all without distinction" (its general significance), that is, all classes and kinds—old and young, men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, and in many instances Jews and Gentiles, men of all nations . . .”

That is also the way that ALL is being used in verse 32, all men, Jews and Gentiles were given over to unbelief both were equally lost, they both were in a position totally dependent on God's sovereign mercy and God has determined to show mercy to ALL that is both Jews and Gentiles without distinction by saving in Christ.

So, what is being said is that at a certain point in time, when the fullness of the elect among the Gentiles have been brought into the kingdom, there will be an ingathering of massive numbers of ethnic Jews. Probably not all who are alive at that part in time, but a number so great that none will be able to doubt it. The situation will be reversed, whereas from the time of Christ until now, the vast majority of Jews have been blinded, then the vast majority will be enlightened and brought to faith.

Paul adds a great argument in favor of this in verse 29, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” God does not go back on his promises or his Gifts, as Hodge explains this section:

The persons whom he hath chosen to eternal life shall certainly be saved; and the people whom he chooses to be his peculiar people, as the Jews were chosen in Abraham, must for ever remain his people. The purpose once formed, and the promise once given, never can be changed. As in the

whole context Paul is speaking, not of individuals, but of the rejection and restoration of the Jews as a body, it is evident that the calling and election which he here has in view, are such as pertain to the Jews as a nation, and not such as contemplate the salvation of individuals.

When will this happen? I don't know. Probably near the end of this present evil age: Paul in his letters speaks of two ages, we live in "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) but we look forward to "the age that is to come" (Eph. 1:21).

How can this happen? God cut them off, he can graft them in again. He is sovereign in salvation. It is sometimes amazing to me that Dispensationalists who are overwhelmingly Arminian in their soteriology and who commonly make statements like "God is too much of a gentlemen to force us to love him" believe that at the end of the age, after what they believe will be the "secret rapture of the church" there will be a mass turning or conversion of the Jews after the true Christians have left. That don't hope it will happen, they are certain it will. Now setting aside the problems of their eschatology for a moment. How could that mass conversion definitely occur at a fixed point in time unless God sovereignly caused it to happen?

But I don't think it will occur by angels preaching or without the Jews HEARING the Gospel as in Romans 10:

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Gal. 3:7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

The Jews need to hear about and believe in Jesus just as much as Gentiles, and if we have this great promise we should be encouraged to be about the work:

Great Need for Jewish Evangelism:

The example of McCheyne: At the close of 1838, his unremitting labor brought on a violent palpitation of the heart, which made it necessary for him to leave Dundee to seek rest and change of occupation. In Edinburgh, Dr. Candlish suddenly asked McCheyne one day what he would think of "being useful to the Jewish cause during his cessation from labor, by going abroad to make personal inquiries into the state of Israel?" The idea thus suddenly suggested led to the sending forth of a delegation from the Church of Scotland to the Jews of Europe and Asia, to inquire into their condition, and to report on the prospects and best means of calling their attention to the character and claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a signal evidence of the high esteem and confidence in which Robert Murray McCheyne was held by his brethren that he was thus honored, in the twenty-fourth year of his age, and was chosen, in connection with three older ministers, as a member of the famous Mission of Inquiry.