
The Gospel: Prospects of Mercy for Israel

Romans 11:1-32

Israel's rejection is neither total (v.1-10) nor is it final (v.11-24). (Moo, *Romans*, p.683). Thus God moves in His electing love to save His people. He places them the all on an equal footing of disobedience and damnation (v.25-32). In this way, His glory is ever more illuminated by the marvelous wisdom by which He moves through time and history to gather up His elect into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (v.33-36).

Are we so self-centered (love as making much of us) that we cannot rejoice in the awesome love of God to save others? Is our experience of the love of God primarily in that He makes much of me? So can we quiver with joyous resonation as God makes much of Himself when He highlights His saving love for others? In other words - why do we care about this text when it doesn't seem relevant to us?

The challenge in a text like this is that it does not resonate with us. Some have an academic interest because they think it answers certain eschatological questions. Nor is it that we should love this text and its truths just because - well, because it is the Bible. I confess that it was not until Friday afternoon that my heart's bell was rung by this text and I hope that sound will come out in the preaching. So, I call you to-

Love a God so faithful that He will not let His people go.

Adore a God so loving He chooses sinners to save all over the world all through history right up until His appearing.

Acclaim a God whose wisdom and ways are so stunning that they draw out our small, self-centered souls to an enlarged savoring and sharing of such a Savior and Sovereign.

In other words, love your God through this text. It is in the end, about the greatness of His wisdom and ways unfolding in salvation history.

In the Believing Remnant**(v.1-6)**

There is a present mercy to Israel so that a remnant is saved by faith.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? (1 Ki 19:10) ³ “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” ⁴ But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Its Personal Illustration**(v.1)**

Paul himself as a believing Jew, illustrates that God has not rejected Israel. He identifies himself according to his Abrahamic (ethnic) descent and his tribe. He is clearly waving around his Jewish credentials. So God has not totally rejected the Jews because God has saved Paul, a Jew. In this way, Paul begins to make a case that the rejection of the Jews that is not total and not final is reversed in a restoration of Jews through salvation. He himself is a case in point.

Its Historical Parallel**(v.2-4)**

Paul makes an assertion on which he grounds his own personal illustration and from which he moves into a historical parallel. God has not rejected, thrust away or pushed away His people. No, He saves them. He reserves them to Himself and causes them to bow their knee to Him.

But that remnant may not be a large or visible group. Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19 to show how God had a remnant, even in the dark and evil days when Ahab and Jezebel squatted like toads on the royal throne of David. Elijah, the prophet of God during that day, experienced the great victory on Mount Carmel and fell almost immediately afterward into self-pity and self-destruction. He felt he was all alone. He was the only one who bowed to God. But God had reserved 7,000 men who had not bowed to Baal because they loved and worshipped God.

So the current remnant may not be visible or prominent to us, particularly in days of persecution and trouble.

Its Present Certainty**(v.5-6)**

And it was just like that in Paul’s day. Though it might look like God had rejected and abandoned Israel completely, Paul says that there is a remnant. And it seems that God intends for us to understand there will always be a remnant of believing, saved Jews. How do I know that? The certainty rests in two clear facts.

They were chosen by God. Election then is a basis for confidence, hope and assurance. God’s electing purpose keeps hope for His people alive. This means that God has taken the initiative to select and save His people, that is, those whom He loves among the Jews.

God's choice is by grace. It is God's sheer grace that chooses and calls and completes salvation. No one deserves it. No one can earn it. And no one gets it just by being a Jew.

Why does Paul make this point? Because he wants once again to highlight the grace of God over against works (v.6). If God's choice is according to grace, then it cannot be based on any works – especially any works man does or even a work of faith that God would foresee. Grace and works are mutually exclusive grounds for God's choice in election. If God choose by grace those (in the context, the remnant – the small band of those Jews) who would be saved, then He did not choose based on their works. If he did, then grace is not what the Bible claims it is.

Its Biblical Proof

(v.7-10)

⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." (Is 29:10) ⁹ And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever." (Ps 69:22-23)

First there is a summary of what he has shown before (v.7). Israel as a nation failed to get what it wanted, but the elect within were saved as a remnant and the rest were hardened. Here Paul points back to his discussion in Romans 9 using the same language.

Then he quotes the Scriptures that support his argument (v.8-10). The focus of these quotes is to show that God is the initiator (v.8) and the planner (v.9-10) of their stumbling, their hardening, their present general state of rejection. This present hardening is not surprising given Psalm 69. In fact, the stanza just before the one cited points to and was cited by, Jesus on the cross. They rejected their King so their King rejects them, turning even their good things into the instruments of their destruction.

Through their Future Restoration

(v.11-32)

This long section has three important purposes:

It serves to shape Israel's hope of a future restoration.

It serves to show how God's wise purposes and providences oscillate between Jewish hardening to Gentile salvation to Israel's restoration.

It serves to warn Gentiles of arrogance, pride and elitism thus spurring them to preach the gospel to all and to receive all.

Because these three purposes are woven throughout, this text is very complicated and in some respects, repetitious. Paul is arguing that Jews are rejected so that Gentiles may be saved so that Jews will really be saved (restored). Hence, the Gentiles must not be proud and the Jews must have hope.

This is one of those texts where there are large redemptive-historical implications. For many, this text is understood through a dispensational lens where the hope and restoration is that of an Old Testament monarchy under Christ and a return to national and ethnic prominence. But, this is not really what it says. Notice that at each major point, it is their salvation, their belief, their inclusion that is in view. The restoration here is that of accepting Jesus Christ as

Messiah who has risen from the dead and ascended to take the seat on David's throne and who is moving toward the day when the inauguration of the Kingdom will be brought to its consummation. You see, the fundamental mistake that was being made by the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day and is being made by many today is to locate the promises and prophecies in an earthly land and kingdom. The New Testament writers locate the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies in Christ. It is all gathered up in Him.

Now let's look together at this intricate shaping of Israel's future restoration – a hope in large-scale salvation.

Its Intricate Purpose

(v.11-16)

Here the movement is that of Jewish trespass leading to Gentile salvation. Gentile salvation leads to Jewish jealousy and thus, some are saved.

¹¹ So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

God designed this in order to make the Jews jealous (v.11-13). Their trespass brought the riches of salvation to the Gentiles all over the world, then what great riches there are when there is a fullness of Jews being saved.

Paul aimed in his ministry to make his fellow Jews jealous (v.14-16.) If this is God's design, then Paul would follow God's design and make much of his own ministry to the Gentiles so that the Jews would desire what they did not have and obtain it by grace – by being saved. And if their present rejection means Gentile reconciliation, then how much greater will their acceptance be – in fact it will be life from the dead – it will be resurrection.

Caution – too much detail, too much “this is that”, may kill the point of this next sentence. Paul may be simply transitioning from one paragraph - lump and loaf being holy (v.11-16) to next paragraph -root and branch (v.17-24) without identifying who the lump and who the loaf are. The point is that there is an integral unity between the two – lump and loaf, root and branch that he builds on in the following paragraph. That unity means that holiness in one secures or guarantees holiness in the other. It is my proposal that the loaf and the root/stem are Christ.

Its Practical Illustration

(v.17-24)

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

The illustration itself is drawn from agriculture. It is the familiar idea of grafting into one plant the branches of another in order to produce a hybrid fruit, a new kind of plant (in the resulting seed or flower) or to revitalize the branch through the fresh living sap of the root and trunk. Paul alludes to the process of trimming off a branch in order to create a place where the new branch will be grafted in. It is not always done that way – a notch may be cut in the stem or trunk with the graftling inserted there.

Though many would see the Olive Tree in this illustration as being Israel, it seems to me that is something being read back into the text because of the Bible's use of the olive tree to represent Israel elsewhere. It seems to me that Paul is using the tree here to represent the people of God united to Christ. Christ is the root and stem, the trunk. The natural branches are Israel and the wild branches are the Gentiles. The breaking off is unbelief breaking the union with the people of God. The grafting in is about union with Christ and the people of God by faith. Remember, in the context, Paul has been primarily concerned to show how disbelief is a part of God's rejection of national Israel, while salvation by faith unites to Christ and His Kingdom people.

This illustration highlights several key points in Paul's thinking about salvation history – Paul's eschatology.

We see that God is interested to show the glory of His grace through faith and to mark out how destructive unbelief is. Israel is severed (and the Gentiles may be as well) because of unbelief.

We understand that God is demonstrating two sides of His character – His kindness and severity. His kindness is manifested in those He saves and His severity in those He condemns. We must never minimize these two lest we lose the power of the Gospel and disfigure the image of God.

We are pointed to the design and purpose of God once again. While cutting off of one leads to the engrafting of another, those engrafted are vulnerable to being broken off so that God may extend His power to once again engraft the natural branches.

Finally, we are warned, the Gentile people of God whom He has moved to save, not to become proud of our status, but to stand in awe of our Savior (v.20). I see an important principle here – pride destroys worship. When we make much of ourselves, we cannot make much of God.

Its Humbling Mystery

(v.25-27)

To protect us further from our conceited elitism that would look down on the Jews who had rejected God, Paul tells us about a mystery.

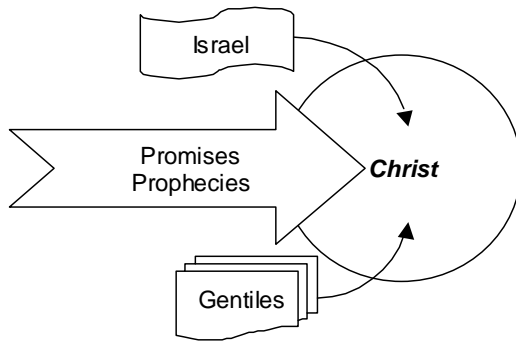
²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷ and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” (Is 59:20-21; Jn 4:22; Hb 8: 8-10)

Now a mystery in the Bible is a truth that has been hidden in the past but is now being revealed, usually with Christ Himself as the key. This mystery is designed to humble all of us before the amazing wisdom and awesome love of God. It is to impel us outward to a wide and broad evangelism to all.

Now I must ask you to bear with me for a bit of exegetical detail. Too often, this text is read as though it says, “a partial hardening happens until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, *then* all Israel will be saved.” This reading of the text is a framework being forced on the text – a framework that sees God as working now in the Gentiles as a shift, parenthesis, or second, parallel track in God’s plan with a future return to God’s primary track with Israel. So the times of the Gentiles runs from the captivity (Daniel) to the rapture, *then* God returns to working with Israel and she is restored.

The problem with this is that it is not what the text says. Most modern translations get it right. As the ESV says, “In this way all Israel...” and the NIV, “And so all Israel...”. Here is how I understand what Paul is saying here. A partial hardening describes the present state of ethnic Israel. But all true Israel by election will be saved along with the full number of the Gentiles. And there will be a large ingathering of Jews near the end of the age according to the rest of Romans 11. I believe I am being honest with the text – and I know of no other way to have both the “until” and the “in this way”. So God is gathering up His people until all the elect are gathered in, including the fullness of the Gentiles and the true Israel among the Jews, yes, even a large number at the end when the broken branch is grafted back in, they are accepted once again.

This will all happen just at the time when the Deliverer comes to banish ungodliness from Jacob for He will fulfill His covenant and take away their sins – that is, they will be saved.



So all that God has promised and all that was prophesied is fulfilled in Christ. Thus we together receive its fulfillment, for we have been placed in Christ.

Its Underlying Principles

(v.28-32)

For the sake of time and space, let me just briefly capture for you these underlying principles.

²⁸As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Their present dual status – Paul shows us that ethnic Israel are enemies for the sake of the gospel, but elect Israel are loved and saved for the sake of the patriarchs. Thus God moves to bring about His purposes in salvation-history while upholding His faithfulness to keep all His promises to the patriarchs.

The Perfect Character of God – God’s character is underscored because He is faithful to the patriarchs and doesn’t go back on what He has given and whom He has called. You can bank on God. In the midst of Jewish transgression and Gentile salvation leading to Jewish jealousy and their salvation, God will glorify every one He has chosen, called and justified. Nothing then can separate us from God’s love and the long reach of His mercy.

The Outworking of Salvation History – God will accomplish what He has set out to do – to glorify Himself by calling out the people of His love so that He will be seen to be large in their lives and in the flow of history. He will work with elaborate planning and exquisite execution so that just when the end comes, the fullness of the Gentiles comes in alongside of a great ingathering of the Jews.

The Overarching Design of God – Verse 32 shows what that arch is: all under disobedience so that all may be subject to mercy. Here is where two all’s in one sentence cannot mean the same thing or you have universalism. All- that is every individual is consigned to disobedience so that all, without distinction, Jew and Gentile, may receive mercy.

From an Immeasurable Wisdom**(v.33-36)**

And here is our response.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Deu 29:29) ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” (Is 40:13) ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

To the intricate details of doctrine we respond with incredible declarations of doxology. As John Piper has reminded us, “All our doctrine of God must bring us to delight in God.” John Owen also called us to “delight in the God of the doctrines for which we contend.” Paul’s missions statement to the Philippians was to strive “for their progress and joy in the faith so that they may have ample opportunity to glory in Christ Jesus.” So truth fuels affections – doctrine under girds doxology.

Its Exclamation**(v.33)**

The danger here is that a too close examination of the text will press our noses so closely to the painting that we will not see nor experience its beauty. Frankly, this is a spontaneous burst of acclaim for the immeasurable riches, wisdom and knowledge of God. Thus, what I want to call for is simply to resonate with this in your soul – to exclaim to yourself – to say it with delighted wonder to your neighbor – to sing in words and music to your God.

Not just so that we will have the experience of worship and doxology as something sought or scripted. Rather we will pursue God, see His great character and mighty ways and praise and acclaim will rise from astonished wonder. This is why I called you in Romans 11 to make much of God in the marvel of His saving love.

Its Explanation**(v.34-35)**

Paul wraps his doxology around the Scriptures, quoting from Isaiah 40:13. This chapter in Isaiah is a rich tapestry of the majestic might and everlasting exaltedness of God. No one can tell Him how things ought to be. And no one can obligate Him to do what He has not purposed to do. No one can put God in their debt. God is utterly free in His grace and His mercy. God is not subject to the critique or criticism of mere mortals, of dust, of jars of clay.

Its Exultation**(v.36)**

Why? Because God is the source of all things. God is the sustainer of all things. And is the supreme end and object of all things. Therefore, He is worthy of being magnified – of our recognition of His glory and ascribing to Him the glory that is His due.

All hail the King, our mighty Ruler and our marvelous Redeemer who has moved with wonderful wisdom to make Himself the full and final satisfaction of all He has made us for. Believe in Him. Bow to Him. O, come let us adore Him, now and forever more, world without end.