

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #2

Romans 11:25-29

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The longing to see God's ancient covenanted people as a Nation restored unto the Lord whom she rejected and crucified is summarized so well in the emotional description provided by that faithful Minister of the Church of Scotland, Samuel Rutherford (from *Rutherford's Letters*, pp. 122,123):

O to see the sight, next to Christ's Coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's necks and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day-dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, thee and thy ancient people in mutual embraces.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the great sorrow that weighed upon his own heart as he contemplated the present apostasy of Israel as a people and Nation (Romans 9:2-3). But Paul holds forth a great mystery in Romans 11:25-26 that explodes with a confident and certain expectation for the future salvation of Israel: The hardening of Israel in apostasy from the Lord Jesus Christ will continue only "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in", and so in this manner and at that time "all Israel shall be saved." As was noted in the previous sermon, this "all Israel" must be contrasted with "the remnant" that God is presently calling out for himself so that we clearly understand that in the future, it will not be a small remnant that is saved, but rather the vast majority of God's ancient people (as a Nation) that will be saved when we read, "All Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26).

O dear ones, what a glorious day that shall be to witness the complete fulfilling of that prophecy in Zechariah 12:10: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have

pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” Notice that it is the free mercy of God that will accomplish this awe-inspiring sight when God pours upon Israel His Spirit of grace to mourn over their rejection, unbelief and treatment of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you even imagine the sight (knowing how the people of the Middle East generally exhibit their grief), the weeping and beating their chests in sorrow and grief? But also what will be the unparalleled and joyous celebration together that Israel will have with the Gentile Nations that have come to Christ as they lift their voices together in singing Psalm 100 of the Psalter to Christ. Let us move on to two more questions to be answered from our text in Romans 11:25-29.

I. How many of Israel is comprehended when it says that “ALL Israel shall be saved”?

A. Do the words “all Israel” mean that every single member that belongs to Israel and that is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be saved? We surely ought not to doubt that with God all things are possible so that if God should choose to save every single member of Israel, He is certainly able to do so. But is that sense of “all Israel” required? I don’t think it is, any more than “all Judea” (Matthew 3:5) means that every single person without exception in Judea went out to hear John the Baptist preach. The word “all” in many cases clearly does not mean “all without exception” or “all in an absolute sense.” Just as the apostasy of Israel was not absolute (because the Lord had reserved to Himself a remnant as we see in Romans 11:5-7), so the salvation of all Israel need not be absolute without exception to the general rule. After we read of the “Spirit of grace” that the Lord shall pour out upon Israel in that glorious time of their salvation (Zechariah 12:10-14), we also read of those who shall be false Prophets in Israel at that time who shall be cut

off (Zechariah 13:3). Thus, if there are false Prophets not all without exception shall be saved.

B. Do the words “all Israel” mean that a significant and representative portion of the people and Nation of Israel will be saved? This I believe is rather the meaning of the words “all Israel.” For when we consider all the times that the words “all Israel” occur in the Bible, we find that these words, “all Israel”, many times do not refer to all Israel in an absolute sense, in which it would convey the idea that none (not one) in Israel was excluded. Let us consider a few representative examples of how the words, “all Israel”, are used by the Holy Spirit to refer to a significant and representative portion of the people and Nation of Israel rather than to every person of Israel.

1. **Joshua 23:1-2.** Note here how “all Israel” consists of not only the people of Israel, but also consists of their National representatives as well. This representative nature of the Nation of Israel, its people and its Rulers, seems to be that which is intended by “all Israel” rather than every living member of Israel. Observe also that the end of this gathering was a Covenant renewed with this same group of people (in Joshua 24:25) who in Joshua 23:1 are described as “all Israel”. Thus, we infer that this Covenant was made and renewed with “all Israel” even though not every person in Israel was present.

2. **1 Chronicles 11:1-3.** Likewise “all Israel” gathered to make David the King of Israel. But “all Israel” again includes both the people of Israel (cf. 1 Chronicles 11:4-6) and also the Rulers of Israel. Again a representative group of the whole Nation (not every Israelite without exception) are gathered at that solemn occasion and brought at that time into a formal Covenant.

3. **1 Chronicles 15:3.** This group consisted of the Priests and Levites (1 Chronicles 15:4) and the Elders and Captains of Israel

(1 Chronicles 15:25) in addition to all of the other people that were present for this most solemn National occasion. Yet it did not include every Israelite without exception.

4. **2 Chronicles 7:8.** But this solemn gathering included not only a large group of Israelites (though not every Israelite without exception), but also included all of the National representatives in Church (2 Chronicles 5:5) and State (2 Chronicles 5:2) as well.

5. **Ezra 10:1-5.** All the same ingredients previously mentioned in passages cited are here again exemplified. In other words, whenever there was a National convocation, it was often stated in these passages and others like it that “all Israel” gathered in a significant gathering of people along with their National representatives. That is simply to say, that a significant and representative “all Israel” (as used here in Romans 11:26) is a plausible and (I believe) a more likely explanation of the meaning of those words.

II. What is the meaning of the term “saved” when Paul states that “All Israel shall be SAVED”?

A. Does the term “saved” mean that “all Israel” (as a significant and representative portion of that people and Nation) are to become regenerate and actual members of the Invisible Church of the elect and actually united to Christ by faith? Or does the term “saved” mean that “all Israel” (as a significant and representative portion of that people and Nation) are to be brought by way of God’s Covenant into the Visible Church (comprised of both elect and non-elect) and brought to outwardly profess faith in Christ as Savior and Lord? Again I would not want to limit God’s power to effectually call and regenerate and to grant saving faith to as many and to whomever the Lord chooses to save, but when we consider Romans 11 and other places in the Scripture may we not also speak of God’s salvation coming to a people or to a Nation when that

people or Nation covenant with God to be His people and outwardly profess faith in Jesus Christ?

B. In Romans 11 the apostasy of a people is likened to breaking off branches and the saving of a people is likened to grafting in branches into the same olive tree from which the original branches were broken off (Romans 11:16-24). Does Romans 11:16-24 teach that those who are effectually called and actually united to Christ by saving faith are also broken off and cursed for their subsequent unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ? For if we maintain that the Holy Spirit intends to teach in Romans 11 that the branches that are said to be holy, said to stand in faith, and are in Covenant with God are all effectually called and regenerated, then we must also conclude that those who are elect from all eternity, effectually called in time, and exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ may also be lost and damned due to apostasy and unbelief (as was true of the branches that were broken off in Romans 11:17).

1. Dear ones, this is not a sermon in which I propose to present the biblical case in support of the doctrines of free grace (which doctrines of grace I wholeheartedly embrace and which are certainly taught by the Spirit of God in Holy Scripture). In the interest of time, I assume the doctrines of grace to be true, namely, that all who come to Christ by saving faith alone, embracing His righteousness and forgiveness and repenting of their sins cannot be lost (now or for all eternity), but shall be raised up in glory on the Last Day to live with Christ forever and ever (John 6:39).

2. Now if that is true, then the branches that were in the olive tree and were broken off could not have been effectually called and regenerated, and their falling away in unbelief does not imply that they ever had saving faith, but rather these branches had an outward profession of faith, and their holiness was not that of an inward and gracious work of God's Spirit, but was rather an outward and federal holiness whereby they were called holy by virtue of their Covenant with

God to be His people. Consider also John 15:1-6 where a very similar analogy is used by Christ wherein a relationship exists between some branches that are said to be in Christ and who are broken off and burned, and other branches in Christ that remain and bear fruit. In the first case, such branches are in Christ by way of a mere external profession of faith and external Covenant (and an outward federal holiness), while the second case consists of those who not only bear the outward acts and relationships just mentioned, but also have the inward and corresponding reality of saving faith and covenantal union and communion with Christ.

C. When Paul states in Romans 11:26, “And **SO** all Israel shall be saved”, the word “**SO**”, though only a single and a very small word in English, that small word carries a very big punch. For that word “SO” means “in this way” or “in this manner” all Israel shall be saved (i.e. in the manner Paul has just been addressing by way of the illustration of the olive tree). All Israel shall be saved by being grafted back into the olive tree from which Israel for the most part was broken off due to unbelief and into which olive tree the Gentiles were grafted in.

1. I would submit that the olive tree itself represents the Visible Church i.e. the Visible Kingdom of God here upon earth (composed of both elect and non-elect). Both the elect and the non-elect within the Visible Church or Kingdom of God have been outwardly called by the Gospel into a Covenant with the Lord (which Covenant of Grace is illustrated here as the “root” of the olive tree in Romans 11:16, for it is the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that is the reason why Israel as a people and a Nation continue to be loved by God even after Israel rejected and crucified the Lord Jesus Christ according to Romans 11:28). This olive tree or the Visible Church (the Kingdom of God) belonged to Israel by virtue of the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham and all his seed. But when the physical seed of Abraham rebelled against the Lord by hating and despising God’s only begotten

Son, their Savior, God broke Israel off (for the most part) from the olive tree of the Visible Church and grafted into the same olive tree wild olive branches or Gentiles from all over the world. This is what Christ prophesied would happen in Matthew 21:43 when He said to the Jews, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” The Visible Kingdom of God and God’s salvation was taken away from Israel as a Nation and was given to the Gentiles. The natural branches were broken off (except for a small remnant of Israel), and wild olive branches were grafted into the olive tree.

2. But also note that the wild branches that are grafted into the olive tree are grafted into the same olive tree from which the natural branches were broken off. In other words, there is only one Visible Church and one Visible Kingdom of God in history. The Visible Church consisting of Israel (for the most part) in the Old Testament had different outward ordinances associated with the Temple and Priesthood than that of the Visible Church consisting of Gentiles (for the most part) in the New Testament. However, it is the same olive tree in the Old Testament when it belongs to Israel (for the most part) as it is in the New Testament when Israel is broken off and it belongs to the Gentiles (for the most part). Likewise, it is the same Covenant of Grace that is preached and proclaimed in the Gospel that is the root and basis for the Visible Church whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament. There is not one Covenant of Grace for Israel or one salvation given to Israel and a different Covenant of Grace and salvation for the Gentiles. Just as Israel (including children) was outwardly a holy people and in the Visible Church by virtue of the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham, so are the Gentiles (including children according to 1 Corinthians 7:14) a holy people and in the Visible Church by virtue of the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham. It is undeniable that it is the same olive tree into which both Israel and Gentiles are grafted, and the same root of which both Israel and Gentiles partake.

D. In order to humble the Gentiles who were tempted in pride to look upon God's method of salvation as implying something of worth within themselves, Paul abases that pride by making clear that the Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree that one time belonged to Israel in order to make Israel jealous (Romans 11:11,17-22). Paul says in effect, "You Gentiles, get off your high horse and realize that the olive tree or Visible Church does not exist because of you; the Visible Kingdom of God upon earth does not stand because of you. The Visible Church and Kingdom exist and stand because of the root (i.e. God's gracious Covenant) not because of the branches. In fact, the original branches (Israel as a whole) were broken off because of their apostasy in turning away in unbelief from that gracious Covenant of God, and so shall you Gentiles likewise be broken off if you do not continue in your profession of faith in that gracious Covenant of God. Neither Israel nor Gentiles are indispensable to the existence and growth of God's Visible Kingdom upon the earth. What is indispensable to God's Visible Church and Kingdom upon the earth is the rich and lively root of God's Covenant of Grace that is proclaimed in the Gospel of salvation. And when a people (whether Israel or Gentiles) professes faith in that Covenant of which Christ is alone the Savior, that people (whether Israel or Gentiles) is brought into the Visible Church where the ordinances of salvation and grace are administered and received.

E. Finally, Paul holds out the hope and expectation of Israel (as a whole, as a body, as a Nation) being grafted back into the olive tree of Christ's Visible Church both because of God's power and God's Covenant (Romans 11:23-25). And then Paul clearly confirms this hope and expectation of Israel being grafted back into the olive tree of Christ's Visible Church and Kingdom with these words in Romans 11:26, "And so [i.e. And in this most glorious, most wise, most gracious, and most just manner and way—GLP] all Israel shall be saved."

F. Let me be quick to say that the salvation of all Israel (as a whole) will likely bring about the inward salvation and regeneration of many and majority of those in Israel at that time for the Lord will turn away ungodliness from them and will take away their sins (Romans 11:26-27). There will be a blessed outpouring of God's Spirit in effectually calling undoubtedly many to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. I do not want to give them impression in any way that when the fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of Israel come into the Visible Church and Kingdom of Christ that it will be predominately filled with hypocrites who merely profess faith in Christ but have not true saving faith. As I read of the work that the Holy Spirit shall accomplish at that dawning of that millennial blessing when Christ shall reign from heaven in such visible and universal glory, it is evident that it will be a time of great spiritual renewal in unprecedented numbers throughout the whole world. However, I also want to make clear (according to the analogy of the olive tree and the branches in Romans 11) that when Paul states, "And so all Israel shall be saved", that he primarily refers to Israel being grafted back into the Visible Church (wherein the Covenant of Grace is preached and wherein the ordinances of the Covenant of Grace are administered) which will then bring about (no doubt) the actual salvation of those who are granted the grace to exercise saving faith alone in Jesus Christ.

G. What are we to learn and apply to our own hearts and lives from these truths.

1. To be a member in the Visible Church (as a branch in the olive tree) does not guarantee (in and of itself) that you will not be broken off and burned on that final Day of Judgment. If you rest all your hopes for salvation upon your mere profession of faith, upon the external ordinances of God's Covenant of Grace (whether the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments etc.), upon your membership in the Covenant of Grace, but you do not trust in Christ alone for your

eternal salvation, nor do you bear the fruit of faith, love and repentance in your life, you too will be broken off and cast into the fire on the final Day. Dear ones, your only hope is in Christ and in the Covenant of Grace wherein he has fulfilled all righteousness for you.

2. If God is able to graft Israel back into covenant faithfulness to Christ after thousands of years of apostasy and unbelief and to do so on the basis of Covenant promises made to Abraham some four thousand years ago, is He not able to graft your covenant children back into the Kingdom of Christ from which they have turned to go in their own way through apostasy and unbelief? Dear ones, pray for them on the basis of the promises made to them in the preaching of the Gospel which they have heard as members of Christ's Visible Church and the promises that were made to them in their Baptism as having an interest in God's Covenant of Grace. Certainly promises made must be received by faith in order to be realized, but if there were no promises made in the first place, then what could our faith as parents lay hold of at all?

3. Just as God has not forgotten His Covenant with National Israel, so he will not forget His Covenant with any Nation (including the Solemn League and Covenant made with Britain and all her dominions). Dear ones, let us always pray according to the Covenant. Let us always lift up our petitions and supplications to God on the basis of His Covenant. When Moses acted as a Mediator for Israel in turning the just and holy wrath of God away from Israel and exalted the mercy of God upon an undeserving people in Exodus 32, to what did Moses appeal? He appealed to God's Covenant with Israel. Listen, dear ones, to the words of Moses in Exodus 32:11-14. And when the greater Mediator to which Moses pointed turned the wrath of God away from us so that the mercy of God might be forever poured out upon us, it was and always will be on the basis of the Covenant of Grace which our Mediator fulfilled for us. Oh, the endless supply of love and mercy that flow from God's Covenant of Grace! Praise be to Father, Son and Holy Spirit for such undeserved love.

