

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #3

Romans 11:25-29

May 3, 2009

Rev. Greg L. Price

Our study of Romans 11 in recent sermons has led to the following conclusions thus far by way of summary. You may want to review all of the biblical reasons given for these conclusions as found in the previous sermons from this text.

1. The "Israel" that shall all be saved (according to the Holy Spirit in Romans 11:26) is neither a spiritual Israel (composed of both Jews and Gentiles) nor an elect remnant from out of the Nation of Israel. To the contrary, the Israel that shall all be saved is the people of Israel as a Nation. The same Nation that fell away in apostasy is that which will be restored unto the Lord. The same Nation of Israel from whom the Kingdom of God was taken (according to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 21:43) is that unto whom the Kingdom of God will be restored (according to the Holy Spirit in Romans 11:26). Since the world has not yet witnessed the salvation of Israel as a Nation subsequent to Paul's inspired epistle to the Romans, the salvation of Israel as a Nation is yet to be fulfilled in the future (and the very near future we hope and pray).

2. The "ALL" Israel that shall be saved is not every single member of the Nation (without exception) that shall be living at that time. Rather, the "ALL" Israel that shall be saved is a way of highlighting the fact that Israel as a Nation and as a moral person will be converted and turn to Christ. In other words, "ALL" Israel simply means Israel as a national body will be saved. Just as in civil and religious convocations of Israel in the Old Testament it was stated by the Holy Spirit that "ALL" Israel gathered, "ALL" Israel crowned a King, "ALL" Israel engaged in a Covenant, or "ALL" Israel performed acts of worship as a way of indicating that these were

national actions of the moral person of that Nation, so likewise God will in the future pour out His Spirit upon the covenanted Nation of Israel to such a degree that the Nation of Israel, as a moral person (consisting of multitudes of families, and its national representatives in Church and State), will be saved.

3. The salvation that shall be brought to Israel as a Nation does not mean that all without exception within the Nation shall be personally regenerated and united to Christ by faith. God will indeed wondrously bring personal salvation at that time to a greater number of Israelites than has occurred before (as indicated in Zechariah 12:10-13:1 wherein God's New Covenant grace in mourning over Christ whom they hated and in embracing Christ by faith will be personally received by the people of Israel as a very large group of which the early chapters of Acts are a mere foretaste, and as indicated by citing the Covenant of Grace in Romans 11:27, cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34). However, I would submit that when Paul states in Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved", he means that Israel as a Nation shall be saved from their apostasy and rebellion against Christ and shall be restored in covenant faithfulness unto the God of their salvation and shall be grafted back into the Visible Church (i.e. the olive tree) to be a Christian Nation (along with many other Christian Nations in the world at that time). Just as Israel, as a Nation, was broken off from the Visible Kingdom of Christ (and from all the ordinances of salvation) as represented by the olive tree, so shall Israel, as a Nation, be grafted back into the same Visible Kingdom of Christ in God's appointed time. This raises for us the next question that we need to answer from our text in Romans 11:25-29.

I. WHEN will "all Israel" be saved?

A. The burden of Paul in Romans 11 is to prove that God has not totally and permanently rejected His ancient people of Israel as a Nation.

For (1st) **Israel's apostasy is not total and complete** as evidenced by the conversion of Paul (who is of Israel) and as evidenced by the conversion of an elect remnant saved by grace during this period in which the greater part of the Nation of Israel is hardened to Christ and the Gospel (Romans 11:1-11); and (2nd) **Israel's apostasy as a Nation is not permanent** as evidenced by the fact that Israel shall yet be grafted back into her olive tree, the Visible Church of Christ (Romans 11:12-32). But when will God bring this to pass? Before answering that question, let us consider the context leading up to Romans 11:25 where the answer to that question is given.

B. Paul has apparently heard of pride and boasting being exhibited on the part of the Gentile members of the Church in Rome which he begins to address very directly in verses 18-24. It would seem that the unity of the Church was being threatened in this case by Gentiles who spoke as if God's redemptive plan for the present and the future was only built around calling the Gentiles and Gentile Nations unto himself to the exclusion of Israel as a Nation. It's interesting to read (between the lines and in the objections to which Paul responds) the pride of these Gentiles in Rome who assume that God is finished redemptively with Israel as a Nation now and forever. According to the Gentile believers in Rome, God is now and in the future chiefly to bring Gentiles into the Kingdom of God (no doubt with a few Jews here and there). That's the pride that was exhibited by these Gentile members of the Church in Rome. But is that not the same position that many Christians today advocate with regard to Israel as a Nation? Dear ones we should understand that Paul cannot be advocating that same position in Romans 11, for it is that very position (which was embraced in pride by the Gentiles Christians in Rome) against which he is arguing. He is arguing in Romans 11 that there is a future in God's redemptive plan for Israel as a Nation.

1. That same ugly pride may be exhibited by Gentiles against Jews today just as it was in Paul's time, but it may also be exhibited by

Jews against Gentiles today who regard themselves as being in a class that far exceeds the Gentile. In some Churches and in some theological circles, the present unbelieving Jewish Nation is so exalted that it can do no wrong. And when one who is Jewish is brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, that person is almost in a class by himself/herself. But dear ones, such pride and exaltation of Gentiles or of Jews (as if one was above the other in spiritual blessedness) bring division within the Church of Jesus Christ. We rejoice with the angels in heaven when a Jew or a Gentile is brought to Christ, for the same grace of God was necessary in either case to raise to life those who were dead in his/her trespasses and sins and to grant saving faith to lay hold of Jesus Christ as one's only hope of eternal salvation.

2. Spiritual pride may also be exhibited by those who so cling to faithful Teachers of the Church or faithful Churches from the past that we look down our noses with contempt at others who do not share the same ecclesiastical ties that we have. This problem of pride fostered division in Corinth when some said, "I am of Peter", while others said, "I am of Paul" etc. We are "Covenanters", and we rejoice in the faithfulness of our forefathers, but we will become like the Pharisees of old if we simply cling to our tradition as a mere outward form of godliness, but deny the power of the Holy Spirit that made them the faithful witnesses for Christ that they were. The light we have of God's truth is never a matter of pride and boasting. It is always a matter of the greatest humility knowing that we are sinners saved by the grace of Christ and deserve no light to illuminate our understanding, but rather deserve only the darkness of hell reserved for the devil and his angels.

C. In Romans 11:24, Paul gives an argument from the greater to the lesser which sets the stage in which he will answer the question as to when all Israel shall be saved. Here's Paul's argument in Romans 11:24: If you Gentile believers as olive branches were taken from a wild olive tree and grafted into a good olive tree (the Visible Church of Christ) which

receives its life from the root (the Covenant of Grace made with the Fathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), how much more **“SHALL”** God graft again the natural branches (the Nation of Israel) into their own olive tree from which they were broken (notice Paul chose to use at this point a future indicative of the verb to emphasize that God will certainly accomplish the national restoration of Israel). Here Paul states not a “maybe” or a “possibly”, but states a “certainty” of Israel being grafted back into its own tree from which it was broken. We are reminded that all of the promises of God are “yea and amen” in Christ (according to 2 Corinthians 1:20). God’s promises may not be fulfilled exactly when we desire them to be fulfilled, but we must always remember that God is all-wise. He never makes a mistake. He is always on time and never late in fulfilling His promises to us. He is able to fulfill all of His promises to us immediately if He so chose to do so. Therefore, His delay is for our good, and it is His divine prerogative to fulfill His promises to us in His own appointed time. He is God! Will He feed you, clothe you, and house you according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus? Absolutely. Will He give good things as a loving Father to those who seek, ask and knock and continue to do so? Without a doubt. Will He change you and conform you into the image of His dear Son? Certainly. Will He save all Israel? For sure. But again we ask, “When?”

D. Now we come to Romans 11:25.

1. Paul didn’t want the Gentiles to be ignorant of God’s plan for the future salvation of Israel as a Nation and as a result boast about matters about which they were ignorant. Dear ones, ignorance is not bliss according to Paul. It is not good that we be ignorant when it comes to the revealed truth of God as found in Holy Scripture. Some Christians find it safer to be ignorant of truth so that they do not have to make difficult decisions about which Church is right or wrong or which family members are right or wrong. But we are to cherish and prize so highly the commandments, doctrine, worship, and Church government revealed to

us by Christ that we buy it with all that we have and sell it not (Proverbs 23:23). Paul calls this revelation from God a mystery because it could only be known and made clear at that point in time by God's inspired revelation. This is not Paul's fallible interpretation of what might happen to Israel in the future, but rather God's infallible revelation of what will happen to Israel in the future.

2. Here then is the mystery stated: "that blindness in part is happened to Israel [i.e. the hardening of Israel's heart as a Nation will continue in that greater part of Israel as a Nation—GLP] **UNTIL** the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." Here Paul prophesies that Israel's blindness (or better, hardness) as a Nation will continue only **UNTIL** the time when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. Here is a clear temporal indicator as to when "all Israel shall be saved." When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in and not before that time, all Israel shall be saved (cf. the use of the same Greek words, ἄχρις οὗ, translated here "until" in 1 Corinthians 11:26 [where the showing forth of the Lord's death by means of the Lord's Supper will continue UNTIL the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, after which we will not need an outward sacrament for we shall see the Lord face to face—GLP] and Revelation 2:25 [where we will only wrestle to hold fast that which we have attained UNTIL the Second Coming of Christ, after which we will never again have to wrestle to hold fast for we will be glorified like our Savior—GLP]). In other words, the salvation of Israel as a Nation shall be preceded by a much greater infusion of Gentiles into the Visible Church than we have yet seen. Thus, Paul answers the question of when Israel's hardness in rebellion and apostasy against Christ shall come to an end: When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. Dear ones, let us step back in awe and wonder as we consider the power of God that will be exhibited in that glorious day. Jesus said that "all power and authority in heaven and in earth" was given to Him (Matthew 28:18). And He shall unleash such a power in the whole world that has likely not been seen since the creation of the world. Dear ones, when Christ effectually calls and regenerates one who is dead and

lifeless to God, He calls that a “new creature” or new creation (according to 2 Corinthians 5:17). The creative power of God is at work in giving life to you who were lifeless. And such a miracle of God’s power and grace should never grow commonplace or ordinary to us. In fact the Apostle Peter says that one reason we do not see more sanctification evident in our lives is that we have forgotten all that God has saved us from (2 Peter 1:9). And what shall we say of not simply one person who becomes a new creature, but of that future time when the power and grace of Christ will be so unleashed in abundance that it will be “life from the dead” (Romans 11:15)?

3. The hardness of Israel will end when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in or enters into what? That into which the fullness of the Gentiles shall come is the olive tree or the Visible Church. The Greek word used here refers to entrance or admission into something—from the perspective of being outside something and then entering into it. Paul uses this word one other time in the letter to the Romans (Romans 5:12 [where sin gained admission or entrance into the world]; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:23,24 and James 2:2 [where people gain entrance into particular Churches]). That which is the focus of the immediate context is that of branches being broken off from the olive tree and branches being grafted into the olive tree or the Visible Church. Thus, the hardness of Israel as a Nation will come to an end when “the fullness of the Gentiles” enters in and gains admission into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. Because the hardness of Israel and its national restoration will be preceded by “the fullness of the Gentiles” into the Visible Church, we must now move to our next question.

II. What is “the fullness of the Gentiles”?

A. We have briefly considered in an earlier sermon the use of the word “**FULLNESS**” (in Romans 11:12)—the same word that is used here in reference to “the **FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25). There (in

Romans 11:12) we noted that “**FULLNESS**” referred to the greater majority of the Nation of Israel that shall be turned to Christ. In Romans 11:12 “**FULLNESS**” is used in contrast to the “fall of them” and in contrast to “the diminishing of them”. Now it was the greater number of Israel as a Nation that fell away from Christ, and likewise, it was the greater number and proportion of Israel as a Nation that was diminished. But the glorious truth about the future of Israel in God’s redemptive plan is that the “**FULLNESS**” or greater number and proportion of Israel as a Nation will be received back into the olive tree from which they were removed. The future “**FULLNESS**” of Israel (Romans 11:12) is likewise contrasted to the present “**REMNANT**” or relatively small part of Israel (by comparison) that is presently being saved (Romans 11:5). Thus, the “**FULLNESS**” of Israel as a Nation carries with it a significant numerical increase in contrast to the diminishing of Israel as a Nation.

B. Now when we come to Romans 11:25 and find the same word, “**FULLNESS**”, used in reference to the Gentiles, we ought to have the same idea in mind: The significant numerical increase of the Gentiles in the future redemptive plan of God in comparison to any other period in history. Otherwise, the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” in the future would be nothing particularly out of the ordinary from what has happened in the past or is presently happening with Gentiles in the redemptive plan of God. However, this “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” (to which Paul points) is something extremely significant, for it will be the signal point at which time the hardening of Israel will cease and “all Israel shall be saved.” Thus, if we consider the number of Gentiles that were brought into the Visible Church at the time of the First and Second Reformations throughout Europe at which time entire Nations (like England, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden etc.) were brought into the Visible Church of Christ and some engaged themselves by National Covenant to be God’s people, that which the Lord will accomplish with the Gentiles in the future in grafting them into the olive tree and the

Visible Kingdom of Christ must be far greater in order to be denoted as the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles”.

C. It is objected that the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” refers not to an enormous number of Gentiles that shall enter into the Visible Kingdom of Christ at some point in the future, but rather refers to the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles that shall be complete at some future point in time. In other words, some have argued that the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” merely means that when God has effectually called all of His elect from among the Gentiles that God then will also have saved all of His elect from Israel. Thus, according to this view, there is no expectation of a great infusion of Gentiles into the Church in the future because all that Paul is saying is that there is coming a time in the future when God will have brought in the full and complete number of His elect, whom He has been bringing in since the time of Paul and shall continue to bring in until the full number have been brought in. Now although the theology of such a position is faithful and true that God will bring in all of His elect whom He has chosen from all eternity to save and that not one will be lost (John 6:37,39), that is not the meaning of the words found in Romans 11:25: “UNTIL the **FULLNESS** of the Gentiles be come in.” Nowhere in Scripture is the Greek word used here for “**FULLNESS**” (πλήρωμα) ever used to mean the full number of the elect. However, this same Greek word is used earlier by Paul in Romans 11:12 to refer to the “**FULLNESS**” of Israel that shall be received into the Visible Church in the future. And in that case, the future “**FULLNESS**” of Israel is not the full number of God’s elect from among Israel throughout time, for the future “**FULLNESS**” of Israel is contrasted with the present “**REMNANT**” of God’s elect from among Israel. In other words, the present “**REMNANT**” of God’s elect are NOT equivalent to the future “**FULLNESS**” of Israel that shall be brought into the Visible Church. Thus, if the future “**FULLNESS**” of Israel does not include the present “**REMNANT**” of God’s elect from among Israel, then neither does the

future “**FULLNESS**” of the Gentiles include the present number of God’s elect that He saving from among the Gentiles.

D. I would submit that the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” refers not only to a large unprecedented number of Gentiles that shall be brought into the Visible Church of Christ, but even more than that to a large unprecedented number of GENTILE NATIONS that shall be brought into the Visible Church by means of national covenanting (Isaiah 19:20-25; Zechariah 2:11; Isaiah 2:1-4). Dear ones, is this not the fulfillment of the Covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 17:5 wherein the Lord promises Abraham that he would be the father of “many nations”? Is this not the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 wherein because all authority in heaven and in earth is given to Christ, therefore “All” the Nations of this world are to be disciplined, baptized and taught even unto the end of the world? When the “**FULLNESS** of the Gentiles” comes into the Visible Church, the Lord will remove the blindness and hardness of Israel and Gentile Kings and Nations that are covenanted and Christian will carry God’s ancient people Israel in their arms and upon their shoulders as a beloved and cherished covenanted people within the same Christian Church (according to Isaiah 49:22). I pray these unworthy eyes may live to see that glorious day of unprecedented blessing upon the Gentiles when their “**FULLNESS**” is come in. What means will God use to bring these blessings about? His ordinary means of grace and primarily the faithful preaching and teaching of Gospel and covenanted truths. How we should give the Lord no rest until He brings this Gospel peace to the **FULLNESS** of the Gentile Nations and to Israel as a Nation. How we should pray that the Lord raise up faithful laborers and Ministers (and all Gospel Officers) who might administer purely the means of grace. For before the harvest is gathered there must be a corresponding increase of faithful Ministers to bring in that harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

Greg Price (John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, *et al.*) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.

"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto" (Galatians 3:15).