

All Israel Will Be Saved

Romans 10:13-11:32

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

These verses are clear and very easy to understand. There would be very little disagreement as to what these statements mean among us today. But what thoughts come into your mind when you hear the words of Romans 11:26: All Israel will be saved? For most of us, this short statement only raises more questions:

What do you mean by Israel?

What do you mean by all?

What do you mean by saved?

What do you mean by "will be"?

Today we are going to look at a rather lengthy chunk of Scripture. We will begin with Romans 10:13 where Paul emphatically states: Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

And we will continue through the end of Romans 11. The last few verses of Romans 11 are a doxology. A doxology is a brief song of praise to God for his greatness. We must ask, "What is it that inspires such praise and adoration in the heart of Paul?" Of course, there are many reasons to praise our God. But here, at the end of Romans 11, it is the statement: All Israel will be saved. The hope of all Israel being saved is encouraging because it is precisely NOT what Paul is seeing in his present experience. Most of Israel is hardened in stubborn unbelief. What makes the unbelief of Jews so hard to swallow is how frequently God has declared himself to be the "God of Israel." When God changed the name of Jacob to Israel it was a big deal. The OT refers to Israel more than 2,000 times. Listen to just a few of them:

Exodus 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

Ruth 2:12 ¹² The LORD repay you (Ruth) for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"

2 Samuel 7:23-24 ²³ And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? ²⁴ And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God.

Psalm 130:7 - 8 ⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. ⁸ And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Jeremiah 31:1 "At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people."

Jeremiah 31:31-33 ³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

As a largely Gentile Church, those of us who believe in Jesus as the Messiah of all who come to him, we would do well to take the time to reflect upon Paul's statement that "all Israel will be saved." May it lift us to praise as it lifted Paul.

The full text has already been read this morning. I would encourage you to have your Bibles open as I walk through this passage.

Romans 10:12-13

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
the same Lord is Lord of all,
bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

13 For "everyone who calls
 on the name of the Lord
 will be saved."

Jesus is the Lord and Redeemer of Israel.

And anyone, Jew or Greek, who believes in Jesus is an equal citizen in His Kingdom.

There are not two kingdoms, one for his Jewish people and one for his Gentile people.

When the gospel is preached, it is for everyone, Jew or Gentile.

14 But how are they to call on him
 in whom they have not believed?
 And how are they to believe in him
 of whom they have never heard?
 And how are they to hear
 without someone preaching?
15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent?
 As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet
 of those who preach the good news!"
16 But
 they have not all obeyed the gospel.
 For Isaiah says,
 "Lord, who has believed
 what he has heard from us?"
17 So faith comes from hearing,
 and hearing through the word of Christ.

God has ordained the means by which people come to faith in Christ. It is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing special about the act of preaching. Paul can refer to it as the "foolishness of preaching." But it is how God has chosen to sovereignly work faith in the hearts of those whom he is calling to himself.

But preaching does not produce faith in everyone who hears. Not everyone who hears obeys the gospel. This was true in Isaiah's time. And it was true in Paul's day. The unbelief of some Gentiles does not really bother Paul. But the unbelief of large numbers of Jews disturbs him greatly.

The unbelief of Israel brings Paul to ask several questions, four to be exact.

1. Have they (Unbelieving Israelites) not heard? (10:18)
2. Did they (Unbelieving Israelites) not understand? (10:19)
3. Has God rejected his people? (11:1)
4. Did they (Israel) stumble that they might fall? (11:11)

These four questions help us to form an outline of Paul's argument.

First question:

18 But I ask, have they not heard?
Indeed they have,
for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."

Paul's question is whether the fault for Israel's unbelief lies with the lack of good preaching. Is their unbelief the fault of the Church for not preaching the truth to them? And his answer is "no". Israel has "heard" the message.

It is a bit strange that Paul quotes Psalm 19:4. This verse refers to God's general revelation of creation.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Paul's point is merely to say that just as God has revealed himself to everyone in general revelation, so the preaching of Christ has been manifested to Israel. God has not hidden himself from his people. They are without excuse.

This leads to Paul's second question:

19 But I ask, did Israel not understand?
First Moses says,
"I will make you jealous
of those who are not a nation;

with a foolish nation
I will make you angry."
20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,
"I have been found by those
who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those
who did not ask for me."
21 But of Israel he says,
"All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and contrary people."

So, if the problem was not lack of hearing, was it a lack of understanding? Maybe God simply made the Gospel too complex, and Israel was not smart enough to grasp it, like we think of Calculus or Physics. Again, Paul answers using OT Scripture.

He first uses Deuteronomy 32:21. Paul's point is that God has enabled "foolish" Gentiles to believe. They are not smarter than the Israelites. Foolish in Scripture does not mean "stupid". And Israel's problem is not stupidity either. It is stubbornness. It is true that Israel lacks understanding, but not the sort that comes from lack of brain power.

Paul continues this line of thinking in verse 20. Maybe Israel just did not work hard enough to understand the Gospel? Well, if that were the case then the Gentiles would never have been saved. They were not even looking.

Paul is quoting Isaiah 65:1-2. Isaiah makes clear that the problem with Israel is their stubbornly disobedient heart. It is not an aptitude for understanding intellectually.

We see here one of the mysteries of the Gospel. One person can hear the gospel over and over and stubbornly refuse to believe, while another person may be asked to church once and upon hearing repent and believe the gospel. God is able to make himself known to those who are not even seeking him. And at the same time, he can hold out his hands daily to a people who are obstinate in rejecting him.

Both are true.

Paul's conclusion is that Israel is responsible for her unbelief. And her unbelief is due to stubbornness. Israel is without excuse.

Romans 11:1.

I ask, then,

The struggle in Elijah's day was with so many in Israel worshipping Baal. You remember the story. Elijah sets up a grand confrontation with King Ahab and the 400 prophets of Baal. The prophets of Baal make their sacrifice and say their prayers. And then they wait upon their god to consume the sacrifice. Of course, Baal is powerless. Then Elijah puts more water on the sacrifice and calls upon Yahweh. Yahweh consumes everything, proving himself to be the true God.

But instead of this resulting in all Israel rejecting Baal and trusting in Yahweh, Elijah finds himself on the run for his life. Elijah believes his own ministry to have been fruitless. Israel is not being saved. Elijah may not even want God to save them. Paul says that Elijah appeals to God "against" Israel. It seems that Elijah would have been fine if God had rejected his people.

But God tells Elijah that he has reserved 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. God has a remnant chosen by grace who are believing. Paul then takes the lesson given to Elijah and applies it to his own day.

5 So too
 at the present time
 there is a remnant,
 chosen by grace.

Even while so many Israelites are stubbornly rejecting the Gospel, Paul concludes that God continues to have a remnant from Israel who are believing in Jesus. And these Israelites have been chosen by grace.

If an Israelite believes in Jesus, we must conclude that God has chosen them by Sovereign grace.

In fact, it is Paul's determination to uphold Sovereign Grace that is most important. Look at verse 6.

6 But
 if it is by grace,
 it is no longer on the basis of works;
 otherwise
 grace would no longer be grace.

Even among God's visible people, salvation only comes through Sovereign Grace.

Israel is not saved on the basis of works. Works here means anything other than Sovereign Grace. So, just as in Elijah's day, many Israelites were not truly saved. They perished in unbelief. But some Israelites were saved. They were not bowing the knee to Baal but believing in Yahweh. And this was due to God's Sovereign Grace.

This is not easy to accept. While God calls us to plead for the salvation of others, we are also called to submit to his Sovereign Grace. If there is anything that we could do to obligate God to save, then salvation would not be of grace.

Paul's reasoning brings him to ask a sub-question:

7 What then?

Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.

The elect obtained it,

but

the rest were hardened,

Notice how Paul makes a distinction between Israel and the elect. Israel failed to obtain salvation. But the elect obtained salvation.

This can be confusing because the Bible can speak of Israel as being elect. Moses speaks to the whole assembly of Israelites in Deuteronomy 7.

ESV Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

But as history works itself out, it is without question that many who are of Israel are not really of God's elect. Paul says that those who were not elect were hardened. He clearly means Israelites. The same sort of judicial hardening that was given to Pharaoh was also given to many in Israel. God gave them (Israelites) a spirit of stupor.

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."

In verse 8 Paul is combining Deut. 29:4 with Isaiah 29:10. This encapsulates the entire period of the people of Israel, beginning to end. The problem of unbelief in Israel was not a problem of any one generation.

Paul makes the same conclusion from David in Psalm 69:22-23.

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."

The idea of their own table becoming a snare means this: The very outward blessings of the Covenant that God gave to his people became something that they trusted in rather than coming to true repentance and faith. Jesus was continually telling many in Israel that they were not really feeding on the true source of salvation. They mocked him declaring themselves to be true children of Abraham. They refused to eat of Jesus' flesh and blood to be truly saved. Their own table became a snare to them. And so, God justly allows their eyes to be darkened.

Bottom line: God hardens many of his own people in unbelief, while saving a remnant chosen by grace. This brings us to Paul's 4th and final question:

¹¹ So I ask,

did they stumble in order that they might fall?

Who does Paul mean by "they"? We are back to the question of "individuals" verses "the whole body of Israel". It seems that while the individual is never completely lost, Paul is now considering Israel more as a whole body.

If I could paraphrase Paul's question it would be something like this:

It is undeniable fact that many who are of Israel are unbelieving. Does this mean that God's overall purpose for Israel is that she would just fall away and be no more? Israel's purpose was only temporal. Now that she has stumbled, God has moved on. Is that the case? Paul is emphatic – No Way! 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!

One cannot read the book of Acts without seeing how the rejection of Jesus by the leadership in Jerusalem, and in the synagogues throughout the world, led to the Apostles taking the Gospel to the Gentile world. And if you know Church History, by the 2nd Century the Church was largely a Gentile Church. It would be easy to conclude from this that God was now finished with saving Israel. But Paul says otherwise. He believed that the saving of individual Gentiles, and the transference of the leadership of God's visible people to the Apostles, was intended to make Israel envious.

Rather than abandoning Israel, God's promises to Israel are still valid. If Israel's unbelief (trespass) resulted in the world receiving the blessing of Abraham, how much more blessing will occur at Israel's full inclusion!

The Greek word for "full inclusion" is *pleroma*. It simply means "fullness". The Holman Standard Bible translates it as "full number". But what exactly Paul means by this is unclear. Does he mean the full number who are truly saved throughout history? Or does he mean the full number of some future generation at the end of the age?

Theologians wrangle over these things. I will give you my thoughts in just a few moments. For now, be content with this one thought: Israel and God's promises to her are not something of the past. God's overall plan of blessing the whole world comes through Abraham. Israel, as a whole people, is still relevant to God's plan of redemption. Gentile Christians need to hear this because otherwise they might overestimate their own importance in God's plan of redemption.

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.

Paul wants the Gentile Christians to understand that their redemption is not for themselves alone. God is using them to make unbelieving Jews jealous. And this is very important to see... this jealousy is working to save "some" of them. Paul does not

envision that every single Israelite will be saved, either now or in the future. But he does envision that through Gentiles embracing Jesus, “some” Israelites will also be saved.

This is consistent with what Paul has already said that God is continuing to save a remnant from Israel, chosen by grace. And rather than Gentile Christians thinking that the current salvation of Jews is irrelevant, they must see that it is when the fullness of Israel accepts Jesus that He will return and set up his eternal kingdom. This is Paul’s meaning in verse 15.

15 For if their rejection means
the reconciliation of the world,
what will their acceptance mean
but life from the dead?

Life from the dead must mean the general resurrection of all believers of all time to the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Paul illustrates his point using two analogies: a batch of dough and an olive tree.

16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy,
so is the whole lump,
and
if the root is holy,
so are the branches.

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,

20 "Branches were broken off
so that I might be grafted in."
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.

He only briefly touches on the dough. The point here is to make the connection between the firstfruits of the dough and the whole batch.

Jesus is the firstfruits. He is holy. And all who are “in him” are also holy.

In the same way, Jesus is the root of the olive tree.

Israel needed to hear this because she thought that she was the root. She was wrong. She was a branch on the tree. And the tree can still live after branches are cut off.

But Paul wants to caution the Gentile Christians of two potential dangers. First, they could think that they do not need to continue believing. God had cut off other branches so that they could be grafted in. Maybe they no longer needed to worry about having a living faith. Paul warns that they must continue in their faith if they hope to be saved.

Second, they could begin thinking that now that they have been grafted in, the broken off branch of Israel is unimportant, forgotten. Not so says Paul. God is able to graft unbelieving Jews back into the tree. He has not forgotten them. Notice that they are grafted back in “if they do not continue in unbelief”. Faith in Jesus is always the means by which anyone is saved. Paul tells the Gentile Christians all of this because he does not want them to be arrogant.

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own conceits,

Brothers and sisters, you have not been smarter than Israel. You were not less proud. You are not in any way better than they. You are recipients of God’s incredible sovereign grace – if you are believing. And if you are not believing, then like Israel, God is simultaneously holding out his hands to you and giving you a spirit of stupor.

May we not be wise in our own eyes. Instead, may we be humble and thankful. God has not abandoned Israel in his overall plan of redemption. That much is clear. But exactly how that plan will work out is not so clear.

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,

God's future for Israel is still a mystery. Mystery in Scripture is something that has not yet been fully revealed. In the OT God spoke of the Gentile world being included in his plan of redemption. But their inclusion was still a mystery until it came to pass. In a similar way, the OT prophesied of the Messiah being a Suffering Servant. But Jesus' death on the cross was still a mystery until it happened. God is going to fulfill all his promises to Israel, to All Israel. But exactly how this will work itself out is still a mystery.

What Paul tells us is that "All Israel" will be saved. What is still a mystery is what that will look like.

There are many analogies in Scripture of Israel.

She is the Body of Christ.

She is Bride of Christ.

She is the Temple of God.

She is the City of God.

These analogies can help you understand the concept of "All Israel being saved".

If Israel is a body, she will not be missing any limbs.

If Israel is a bride, she will not be deformed.

If Israel is a Temple, she will not be missing any bricks.

If Israel is a city, she will not be full of unfinished buildings.

As we look around today, we see people being saved, even Jews being saved. But we could hardly say that we see the fullness of God's people being saved. That fullness is still to come.

There are two basic ways in which theologians think this will work out. The first is this: God is currently only saving a remnant of Jews while he is primarily saving Gentiles. But when the fullness of Gentiles have come in and God is finished saving them, then he will again work afresh to save "All Israel".

This view takes "until" to distinguish God's saving activity before from that which comes after. There are several ways in which this is worked out, but they all look for a mass conversion of Jews at the end of the age.

The second view is a minority view. It does not necessarily see any future mass conversion of Jews at the end of the age. Instead, it understands that the final assessment of "All Israel" will be expanded to include believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews. This view focuses on the phrase "in this way" all Israel will be saved. The "way" is through the fullness of Gentiles and the remnant of Jews throughout all history

together making up the fullness of Israel. This view does not depend upon a future mass conversion of Jews in the final days before Jesus' return. Certainly, God is free to do so in his Sovereign Grace. But we are not somehow waiting for it to happen. The saving of Gentiles and the saving of Jews is happening throughout the present age. When God is finished together they will make up "all Israel."

I hold to this second view. I think it makes good sense of the passage and I think that it fits with the rest of Scripture. God does not have two separate peoples. We are one people in Christ.

But while I hold to the second view, I must admit that it is still a mystery. Paul says as much. I hold in high regard many who think differently. As usual, Paul supports his argument from the OT. (Isaiah 59 and Jeremiah 31) In these passages we see that Jesus was not given to merely save Gentiles. He was given to redeem Israel from her sins.

as it is written,

"The Deliverer will come from (OT - to) Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

27 "and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."

It is fine to include Gentiles in this promise as those who are grafted into the olive tree. But it is not fine to ignore that Israel must also be a part of this promise. God is taking away ungodliness from Jacob as he calls Israelites to himself by his Sovereign Grace.

So, how does Paul want us to think about unbelieving Jews?

28 As regards the gospel,
they are enemies of God
for your sake.

But

as regards election,
they are beloved
for the sake of their forefathers.

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

We must think about Jews in two ways.

They are enemies of Christ as long as they continue in unbelief. We must not have some anti-gospel ideas that they will ever be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Far too many Christians have this unbiblical view that Jews will be saved whether or not they ever come to faith. A Jew can only be saved by believing in Jesus Christ.

But it is true that God does love Israel, even in their unbelief. We can understand this as we see those who were once in the Church who have walked away from their faith. We should also have abiding affection for those who embrace the Jewish religion while still being hardened in unbelief.

God is absolutely sovereign! Why do we have to go through all of this unbelief and hardening? Why does God not simply save his people and be done with it? The answer is very simple: God wants all of his people to know that they have been saved by His sovereign mercy alone!

30 Just as you (Gentiles) were at one time
 disobedient to God
 but now
 have received mercy
 because of their disobedience,
31 so they too
 have now been disobedient
 in order that by the mercy shown to you
 they also may now receive mercy.
32 For God has consigned all to disobedience,
 that he may have mercy on all.

Verse 32 is the climax of all that Paul has taught. God has consigned (bound, shut up, imprisoned) all to disobedience. Why has He done this? So that he may have mercy on all. This does not mean Universalism – everyone will be saved in the end.

It means that everyone who is ever saved is saved by mercy.

Do you believe in God's Sovereign Mercy? Not just as a doctrine, but as a reality in your own soul? Or do you cling to something in yourself that has made you acceptable to God? And do you see that even your faith is a gift that God has sovereignly given to you? And do you know that if you have made any progress in sanctification, that this is the result of God removing godlessness from your life?

All Israel will indeed be saved. And every member of Israel will be saved by mercy alone. We are saved by Grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone. Does your view of God's Sovereign mercy bring you to sing with Paul:

33 Oh, the depth
of the riches
and wisdom
and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments
and
how inscrutable his ways!

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?"

36 For from him
and through him
and to him
are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen.