

The Meaning of "All Israel Will Be Saved" in Romans 11:25-27

"Lest you be wise in your own sight, 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."'" (Romans 11:25-27 ESV)

In his commentary on Romans Douglas Moo states, "the first clause of v. 26 is the storm center in the interpretation of Romans 9–11 and of NT teaching about the Jews and their future." I agree with him. It is a passage we must understand and faithfully declare. It contains truths that Paul warns us about being ignorant of.

In this session we will look at four questions: (1) Who is "Israel"? (2) What does "All" mean? (3) When are they "Saved"? (4) How are they "Saved"?

Under each question I will show the various perspectives first and then what I believe Paul actually meant last (of which is highlighted in blue).

I. Who is "Israel"?

- Jews and Gentiles/Spiritual Israel?

"Paul actually began the whole section (9:6) with ... a programmatic distinction of two "Israels", and throughout the letter (e.g. 2:25-9) as well as elsewhere (e.g. Philippians 3:2-11) he has systematically transferred the privileges and attributes of "Israel" to the Messiah and his people. It is therefore greatly preferable to take "all Israel" in v.26 as a typically Pauline polemical redefinition, as in Galatians 6:16 ..and in line also with Philippians 3:2ff., where the church is described as "the circumcision." - N.T. Wright ¹

"I conclude that Israel in Romand 11:26 is a name for the expanded spiritual Israel, the church as the covenant people of God, rather than the nation. The view expressed does not exclude conversion of large numbers from the Jewish people in the course of history, and it ties in with the distinction made in Romans 9:6 that the true Israel is believers." - Dr. Rowland S. Ward

"Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word Israel to all the people of God, according to this meaning - "When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both" - John Calvin ²

- Ethnic Jews/National Israel

The contrast of the words "partial Israel," "all Israel" and "the Gentiles" in verses 25-26 rule out the possibility that Paul is referencing the ethnically diverse Jew-Gentile Church. He is intentionally making the contrasts. There are three groups mentioned in Romans 11:25-26. We must identify all three and observe the implications for each group.

¹ *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*; pg. 250

² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 437.

Paul draws a distinction between Israel **"of the flesh"** and Israel **"of the promise"** in Romans 9:6-8. This distinction is used to differentiate between national ethnic Israel in their state of unbelief and the **"remnant according to the election of grace"** (11:6) who with converted Gentiles comprise **"the Church."** This distinction is essential to understanding Romans 11. Repeatedly in Romans 11 Paul refers not to **"Israel of the promise"** but to **"Israel of the flesh"** who have **"stumbled"** and **"transgressed"** and been **"cast away"** and **"hardened"** in **"disobedience"** and **"unbelief."** This rebellious **"Israel"** is the **"Israel"** Paul speaks about in Romans 11:26 that will be **"saved."**

Paul's quotation of Isaiah and Jeremiah in verse 27 which includes the reference to "Zion" (Jerusalem) and "Jacob," along with statements "enemies of the Gospel" and "beloved for the sake of the forefathers" in verse 28 are clearly about ethnic Jews who have rejected the Gospel. The idea that Paul would speak of the Church in verse 26 and then ethnic Jews in verse 28 bears no legitimacy.

II. What does "all" mean?

Barry Horner writes: This is the most controversial statement in the chapter. There are three main perspectives: (1) "All Israel" refers to "the redeemed of the New Testament era who constitute the Church, whether converted Jews or Gentiles. Thus the Christian Church has become the new Israel that has replaced the former Old Testament nation... (2) "Israel" here refers to the accumulation over many centuries of the saved remnant of national Israel (11:5). While it is comprised of Jewish Christians, it merges with the Church which is the new Israel... (3) "Israel" refers here to a future national conversion of Israel, the larger unbelieving segment in particular, that results in Israel serving under Christ in the promised Land with restored glory." ³

- The elect Jews throughout history? (PRESENT TENSE)

"...all Israel" refers to the elect ethnic Jews throughout history." - Ben L. Merkle ⁴

- The Church (and the remnant of believing Jews)? (PRESENT TENSE)

"Gentiles now fill up the ranks of all Israel." - Martin Woudstra

"The church, then, as the people of the New Covenant has taken the place of Israel, and the national Israel is nothing other than the empty shell from which the pearl has been removed and which has lost its function in the history of redemption." - Herman Ridderbos ⁵

"...hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant..." - Bruce Waltke ⁶

"...the church is in fact the true Israel of God." - George Eldon Ladd ⁷

- Every Jew in history in the present tense? ('Dual Covenant Theory') (PRESENT TENSE)

"There really is no need for any Christian mission to the Jews. They are and remain the people of God, even if they do not accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah." - Eric Gritsch ⁸

³ Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel*, pg. 260.

⁴ from: [Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society](#) Volume: [JETS 43:4 \(Dec 2000\)](#); Article: Romans 11 And The Future Of Ethnic Israel

⁵ H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, (Eerdmans 1975 344-345)

⁶ from *Kingdom Promises as Spiritual*, in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, pg. 274

⁷ from *A Theology of the New Testament*, pg. 433

⁸ "Luther and the Jews: Toward a Judgment of History," in *Luther and the Jews* (n.p.: Lutheran Council in the USA, 1995), 9.

"The Jews of today, as ever, receive salvation through their having been chosen by God in covenant with Abraham, Moses, and the prophets....My position is that the Jews do not require evangelization." - George Sheridan ⁹

Krister Stendahl, the late bishop of Stockholm, Sweden, pointed out that Paul did not specify that "all Israel" would accept Jesus as the Messiah, only that they will be saved. He then observed that Paul does not mention the name of Jesus Christ between Romans 10:18 and 11:36. And he noted that the concluding doxology (11:33-36) is the only doxology in Paul's writings that includes no Christological reference. Thus, Israel may be saved apart from believing in Jesus. ¹⁰

John Hagee is often accused of this. He denies it. Yet still asserts it.

- Every Jew who survives the time of Jacob's trouble when the "times of the Gentiles" are complete at the end of the Age (FUTURE TENSE)

3 And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, 4 when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning...." (Isaiah 4:3-5)

Partial blindness will end. Comprehensively. "**Part**" of Israel in v. 25 is in contrast to "**all**" of Israel in v. 26.

Verse 12 and 15 point to an eschatological "**full inclusion**" that results in "**life from the dead**" and unprecedented "**riches for the whole world.**" This "**full inclusion**" is a key phrase. It emphasizes the distinction between the "**partial hardening**" and "**all**" being saved.

By saying "All Israel will be saved" and then quoting Isaiah and Jeremiah he was pointing to the large body of prophetic texts that speak of a sweeping conversion of every living Jew when the New Covenant reaches its eschatological climax and consummation:

"And all your children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of your children." (Isaiah 54:13)

"...this is my Covenant with them," says the Lord: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,' says the Lord, 'from this time forth and forevermore.'" (Isaiah 59:21)

"Your people also shall all be righteous: they shall inherit the Land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." (Isaiah 60:21)

"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

"And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting Covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." (Jeremiah 32:39-40)

"Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which cause them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own Land, and have left none of them any more there." (Ezekiel 39:28)

"In the whole land, declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'" (Zechariah 13:8-9)

III. When are they saved?

⁹ in Mitch Glasser, "Critique of the Two Covenant Theory," *Mishkan: A Theological Forum on Jewish Evangelism* 11 (1989): 2, 45.

¹⁰ from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/novemberweb-only/148-11.0.html?start=1>

- Throughout history to the present time through the "election of grace"? (PRESENT TENSE)

"As the fulness of the Gentiles is brought in and 'until' this is finished, so, in this manner, 'all Israel' will be saved....." - Martin Woudstra ¹¹

- At the climax and conclusion of the time of Jacob's trouble (FUTURE TENSE)

The post-exilic prophecy of Zechariah 12-14 describes the timing of the salvation of all of Israel. This is what Paul meant by the completion of "the times of the Gentiles." The word "until" is decisive. All forms of Successionism and Replacement theology cannot coherently explain why Paul would use the word "until" if all Israel is currently being saved. The word until is critically important to Biblical eschatology (see Acts 3:21; Luke 21:24 and Ezekiel 30:3; [where the term originates]).

IV. How are they saved?

- Through Gentiles entering the new Covenant through the "election of grace" history? (PRESENT TENSE)

"During this period of time, the Gentiles are to come in to the people of God: and that is how God is saving 'all Israel' ... What Paul is saying is this. God's method of saving 'all Israel' is to harden ethnic Israel (cp. 9.14ff.), i.e., not to judge her at once, so as to create a period of time during which the gentile mission could be undertaken, during the course of which it remains God's will that the present 'remnant' of believing Jews might be enlarged by the process of 'jealousy', and consequent faith, described above. This whole process is God's way of saving his whole people: that is the meaning of 'and so all Israel shall be saved.'" - N. T. Wright ¹²

- Through the Abrahamic Covenant? ("Dual Covenant Theory") (PRESENT TENSE)

- By grace through faith in Jesus at the outpouring of the Spirit when the "appointed time to favor Zion has come" (Psalm 103:13) and the surviving remnant "looks upon Him whom they pierced" at the second coming to mourn for Him. (FUTURE TENSE)

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. 11 On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great.... 12 The land shall mourn, each family by itself...On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." (Zechariah 12:10-13:1; Mt 24:29-31; Rev 1:7)

3 And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, 4 when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. 5 Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy." (Isaiah 4:3-5)

"24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses." (Ezekiel 36:21-29)

"...I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day." (Zechariah 3:9)

¹¹ "Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 236

¹² from "Christ, the Law and the People of God: Romans 9-11," in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 249-50.