

## Lesson 28: God's Plan for Israel Involves a Future Revival, part 2

### Romans 11:25-32

<sup>25</sup> For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery  
so that you will not be wise in your own estimation

(1) that a partial hardening has happened to Israel

(2) until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

(3) <sup>26</sup> and so all Israel will be saved;

just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,

HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

<sup>27</sup> "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,

WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

<sup>28</sup> From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake,  
but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

<sup>29</sup> for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

<sup>30</sup> For just as you once were disobedient to God,

but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,

<sup>31</sup> so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you  
they also may now be shown mercy.

<sup>32</sup> For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

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### Introduction

What do you take credit for? And who do you blame? How often do you take credit or feel good because of the achievements of somebody else? I felt great when Croatia came in second in the World Cup, and I just live here. I am not even Croatian. I feel the same with NC State, that means I am up and down a lot. Does that make any sense? That's my association with a people, a tribe a pack. Why would that define me or give me significance or make me feel good? I don't train. I don't have any skills. I just wear the shirt and glory in the victory.

Parents do something similar. Moms and Dads post online achievements of their children and glory in their success. On a much larger scale we do this culturally. On a really large scale, the West boasts advancement in science, rule of law, better gender equality. And so, we in the West feel smarter, more cultured, better than the East. Family, race, tribe, culture, there is something in us that finds value in the group, in our group, something that makes us feel, smarter, nicer, funnier, wiser, stronger, richer, better.

We take pride in the achievements of other people in our group. This trend certainly extends into religion and into Christianity. I love Tim Keller. And I love telling people that I went to the same seminary as Tim Keller. We've never met but that doesn't matter, still makes me feel good about myself. On the negative side, I hate it when a pastor is caught in a scandal. It affects my own sense of worth. And shamefully, I have to admit that if a pastor is going to be immoral, at least let him be from another denomination, so I do not have to feel so bad about myself. What does that say about me? Nothing good. We derive honor and value from our family, from our people, from our group, from the tribe that we choose to belong to.

God has a plan that involves peoples. Way back when Jesus was here that plan included a village of Samaritans coming to faith in him and a multitude of Galilean Jews walking away from him. That plan included the spread of the gospel that moved out from Israel to pagans, spreading East and West but mostly West. That plan took the gospel through Europe to North America. Colonization took the gospel to the coasts of South America, Africa, India, China. Then the gospel began to move inland. As Europe and the United States move in the direction of being post-Christian, the gospel faith continues to grow in places like Brazil and China.

At no stage in the plan has the gospel come to a people because they are worthier than their neighbor. The gospel goes out by the mercy of God.

The ebb and flow of the gospel through the peoples of the world does not affirm or validate any ethnic group as smarter or better or more spiritual or kinder. We have all been hard to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can all be hard again. All will receive mercy, and all can receive mercy again.

Our text today begins in Romans 11:25, “I do not want you, brethren, to be uniformed of this mystery, so that you will not be wise in your own estimation.” Rejoice in what God has done but do not let it become a source of ethnic pride or superiority. That’s not how you got the gospel.

Christians through the centuries have ignored Paul’s teaching about not becoming wise in their own eyes, about not looking down on the Jews. Christians have a shameful history of persecuting and vilifying Jewish people, of ignoring Paul in Romans chapter 11. The attack this past week by a gunman, killing 11 worshippers in a synagogue in Pittsburgh reveals the demonic extreme. Paul calls us to reject any sense of superiority at all. He argues that the root of true worship, true religion, true civilization is in the Jewish people. And though Israel, as a people, is currently in a hardened state against the gospel, this has not always been, nor will it always be in the future. God did not turn from the Jews because they are particularly bad, nor did he turn to Gentiles because they are particularly good. God’s choice is by mercy and is open to all who will believe. The gospel is not for the better, the smarter, the wiser, the more moral, the religious. The gospel is for the humble. The gospel is for those who get the depth of their own sin and know that all the good comes by the grace of God.

Romans 11:25-32 completes Paul’s response to the wrong idea that Israel has fallen out of God’s plan while also completing the larger argument in chapters 9-11. Let’s read 11:25-32.

[Romans 11:25-32]

I like the way Douglas Moo understands the division of the text. In verses 25-26a Paul presents the mystery that Israel will experience salvation. He will then show us that this mystery is confirmed by Scripture (26b-27); rooted in God’s faithfulness to his promises (28-29); and representative of God’s impartiality to all peoples (30-32) (Moo, NICNT Romans, 712).

### **I. All Israel will be saved (25-26a)**

We are continuing with Paul’s long answer to the rhetorical objection back in verse 11, “Israel did not stumble so as to fall, did they?” I suggested that Paul has in mind Israel falling out of God’s plan of salvation. We know that Israelites are not rejected. There continues to be a significant remnant of Jewish believers in Jesus. But is that it for Israel as God’s people? Is the church now the new Israel with no special role for Israel? Paul does not accept the church as fulfilling all the Old Covenant promises made to Israel. Paul’s indicates the story has not yet been completed in a way that satisfies God’s plans for Israel.

Paul began his long answer arguing that Israel has indeed stumbled over the stumbling block of Jesus. And that has turned out as blessing for the rest of the world. The Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah led to his crucifixion, such that whoever believes in him might receive forgiveness. Furthermore, the Jewish refusal to accept Jesus allowed the gospel to go out unencumbered by the strong cultural wrapping of Judaism. Gentile peoples were able to receive Jesus as their own without feeling they must first become Jewish. And so, the transgression of the Jews resulted in riches to the Gentiles.

Paul extended his argument with a “much more.” If their transgression produced riches for the world how much more will their fulfillment be! Paul looks ahead to the fulness of Israel, to spiritual abundance for his countrymen. “And why not?” he says. The body of Christ is like a tree that has Jewish roots. They are the natural branches. The shocker is that Gentiles have found a home here. Jews would naturally fit back in if they were to yield to Jesus as Messiah.

So, now we continue the third part of Paul’s argument that Israel has not fallen out of God’s plan in today’s lesson. Paul begins with his practical purpose. He says, “I do not want you to be uniformed about this mystery, because I do not want you to be wise in your own estimation.” That’s the application point. That’s how we began this lesson. Do not let the blessing and riches that have come to you, and the benefits that you have received in your culture and in your church and in your walk

with God, do not let that become a point of pride or superiority. There is no reason why anyone once hardened might not experience revival, especially the Jews who have held such a special role in the outworking of God's plan of redemption.

What is this mystery Paul does not want us to be in the dark about? Paul explains the mystery with three phrases, and this is in 25 and 26. First, (1) "a partial hardening has happened to Israel." The fact of that hardening is no mystery. Everyone is aware of that. The hardness of the Israelites towards Jesus prompts this whole section starting in chapter 9. How can Jesus be the Messiah if God's people have rejected him? It is surprising. But Paul has explained. God forewarned that Israel would stumble over Jesus. Second, the second phrase, this partial hardening will continue (2) "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." God has a plan for the spread of the gospel through the world that will end in the vision of Revelation which depicts representatives from every tribe, people, nation, language worshipping God the Father and Christ the Son. Now, considering the extent of Christianity during the day of Paul, such a vision of the fulness of the Gentiles may have seemed mysterious, though not completely, considering that Paul had already planted churches through Asia Minor and into Greece and was communicating with a primarily Gentile church in Rome, in the heart of the empire. The main thrust of the mystery comes in the third phrase, (3) "and so all Israel will be saved." Paul sees a future revival of Israel. That's the mystery.

We need to unpack this phrase, "all Israel will be saved."

Let's start with the "and so." "And so, all Israel will be saved." What's the logical connection there? I think the connector implies the process that Paul described in verses 11-15 and that he is going to continue to describe in verses 30-32. Jesus came. Israel stumbled. Gentiles experienced the riches of the gospel. When the fulness of the Gentiles is complete, God will soften the hearts of the Israelites. "And so, all Israel will be saved." The "and so" points to the salvation of Israel as a culminating event in God's plan of salvation among people through history.

We will get to the "all" in "all Israel" in a minute. Before that we need to clarify what Israel refers to here. Here are three options that have been suggested.

Option 1: Israel designates the family of the redeemed, including all true believers, Jew and Gentile.

Option 2: Israel designates ethnic Israel both past and future.

Option 3: Israel designates ethnic Israel as a future generation of Jews.

So, let's start with the first option. Israel designates the family of the redeemed, including all true believers, Jew and Gentile.

*Option 1: Israel designates the family of the redeemed, including all true believers, Jew and Gentile.*

This option suggests that Israel here is a spiritual or metaphoric term representing everyone who has trusted God's revealed plan of salvation, so all believers before Jesus and all believers after Jesus. In this present age Israel would equate with the church or with the body of Christ. And the view provides a solution for what it means to say "all Israel" will be saved. It is saying that everybody who has trusted in the saving plan of God will be saved. The view also explains why some prophecies made to the people Israel seem to have been fulfilled in the church.

Some proponents of this view would look back to the use of Israel in 9:6 where it says, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." They suggest that the phrase "not all Israel who are descended from Israel" indicates that Israel includes more than those who are of the bloodline of Israel. So, it's not just physical Israelites, ethnic Israelites, but it's more. It's not just those descended from Israel. It's more. So, you do not have to be descended from Israel to be of Israel. The children of Abraham are both of the physical and the spiritual seed of Abraham.

There is no logical reason why Paul could not use the term Israel in a metaphoric way like this. The problem is in the context. So, consider three things.

1. First, in the immediate context of verse 25 Paul said that a partial hardening has happened to Israel. If Israel is a spiritual term for all believers, then a partial hardening doesn't really make sense.

The partial hardening makes sense when we think of Israel as an ethnic people which has members hardened, some of whom are hardened against the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Israel in verse 26 to be a label for all believers, we would have to conclude that Paul switched meanings from verse 25 to 26 without giving us any indication.

2. This brings up a second problem. Paul only uses the term Israel in Romans in this major section of chapters 9-11. This use in 11:26 is the eleventh and final occurrence in these three chapters. Except possibly for the first use in 9:6, the other nine uses of the term Israel refer to the people group made up of ethnic Jews. Israel is used in these chapters in contrast to Gentiles who are ethnically not Jewish. We can imagine Paul using Israel metaphorically or spiritually but that has not been his use in this whole section of Romans. It would be a pretty big interpretive stretch to think that Paul used a term consistently nine times or ten times and then, without warning, expects us to understand in this last use in verse 26 a different meaning. So that he would switch all of a sudden from ethnic Israel to spiritual Israel.

3. A third problem has to do with the context of 9:6 where Paul states “not all descended from Israel are Israel.” In chapter 9 Paul is not making the membership of Israel more inclusive to include Gentiles. That is misunderstanding the phrase. He is making the membership of Israel more exclusive to exclude some Jews. I made this point in an earlier lesson. It is not both sons of Abraham who are chosen but one; not both sons of Isaac but one. Paul’s historical argument validates God’s choice to include Gentiles. It also validates God’s choice to exclude Jews, only a remnant will be saved. This is a narrowing down of which Jews make up true Israel until Paul concludes in 9:27, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved.” So, in a sense, only the remnant is true Israel, according to the argument in chapter 9. It is a narrowing down of who really is Israel. And so, the point for our purposes is to recognize that 9:6 does not indicate a spiritual expansive term of Israel. It doesn’t support a view in verse 26 that Israel is all those who believe.

Paul consistently uses Israel in 9-11 to indicate the ethnic people Israel. So, I think we have to reject the interpretation that suggests that Israel here has a special, spiritual meaning which means all believers. No. We are talking about ethnic Israel. So, option 2 is that Israel designates ethnic Israel past and future.

*Option 2: Israel designates ethnic Israel past and future.*

This interpretation suggests universal salvation for all Jews, that somehow God’s plan was that all Jews would be saved for all time. And it is not really a serious option. I am only mentioning it because I have actually heard it, and it has been suggested to me. It’s usually by somebody who is not looking at the broader argument at all. They have just read through Romans and the phrase catches their attention. And they fix on this idea that “all Israel will be saved.” The option does not make sense at all with biblical history or with the present context. Paul’s lament to start chapter 9 assumes that the majority of Jews of his day are cut off from the hope of salvation in Christ. So it does not apply to all of ethnic Israel past and future. That brings us to option 3. Israel designates ethnic Israel as a future generation of Jews, some point in the future.

*Option 3: Israel designates ethnic Israel as a future generation of Jews.*

Verse 25 places the comment into the temporal dimension. In this present time or age, a partial hardening has happened to Israel. They are considered collectively as a vessel of wrath, to use the language of chapter 9, and have been removed from the olive tree of God’s people, to use the metaphor in chapter 11. Not every single Israelite rejects Jesus, a remnant remains, but the majority resist the gospel. As Paul says, Israel is currently experiencing a partial hardening. That hardening is to last until the fullness of Gentiles has come in. Some time in the future God will consider the fullness of the Gentiles to be complete. And when that happens, all Israel will be saved. We are looking towards a future event in the life of the people of Israel.

This is my view. I believe we are talking about a future revival among ethnic Israel. This is what Paul is looking towards when he speaks in verse 12 of the fullness of Israel. Just as we have had the fullness of the Gentiles in verse 25, we are looking ahead for God to complete his plans for the Jews.

Now we need to talk about the word “all.” If we are talking about ethnic Israel what does “all Israel” mean? Must that mean that every single living Israelite when the time comes will place his or her faith in Jesus? Or can the all carry a general sense, like all of Croatia came out to cheer their world cup team when they returned home or like when we say, the whole school turned up or all the neighbors were there? We use the word all in language sometimes to mean every single person but sometimes to mean the majority or an impressive percentage. And I understand that this interpretation is frustrating for some who want more precision and that it is possible that Paul has in mind every single Israelite. I am not saying it is not. Still, I think Paul is using the word “all” in the more general sense. We are looking forward to a revival among the majority of Israelites which will happen after God is satisfied with the spread of the gospel among Gentiles. It does not require every single Israelite to believe, but it will cause the Gentile church to look with wonder and remark, “Wow! All Israel has come to faith in Jesus.”

Paul supports his understanding of this mystery first by the confirmation of Scripture, then by God’s faithfulness to his promises and finally by how it shows God’s impartiality to all peoples. So, first the confirmation of Scripture which comes in verses 26b-27.

## **II. The mystery is confirmed by Scripture (26b-27).**

“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.<sup>27</sup> THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

Paul’s quote of Scripture here stays consistent with his practice all the way through 9, 10 and 11. He has quoted Scripture throughout and especially at the end of each section. He has also drawn heavily on Isaiah. At the end of every section he has had a quote from Isaiah.

The Greek text that Paul quotes here matches Isaiah 59:20-21a and Isaiah 27:9. His use is in line with how those verses were translated in the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek interpretation of the Hebrew Bible available in Paul’s day. Paul seems to have made just one change from the Septuagint. Whereas Isaiah says that the deliverer will come to Zion or for the sake of Zion, Paul says the deliverer will come from Zion. So, that’s strange. I do not know why Paul makes this change. Douglas Moo suggests that Paul does it to emphasize that Jesus will be going to come from the heavenly Zion. That may be. I don’t know. I can’t figure that one out.

Paul’s quote has connection points with other passages in Isaiah. One very notable one occurs in chapter 45 where Isaiah begins with promise of physical deliverance for Israel from exile in Babylon through the Persian king and then the chapter shifts from this great deliverance out of exile to an even greater spiritual deliverance that must occur if Israel is to be saved from herself. The chapter is full of the salvation and righteousness language that Paul has been using in Romans. He started his thesis in 1:16-17, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the salvation of God for everyone who believes for in it the righteousness of God has been revealed.” So, this conjunction of that language, the salvation of God and the righteousness of God is not new with Paul. It’s normal for Isaiah. And you would really get it, especially if you would go back and read the second half of Isaiah 45. Let’s just read the end of that, the end of 45, verses 22-25.

<sup>23</sup> “I have sworn by Myself,

The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness

And will not turn back,

That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*.

<sup>24</sup> “They will say of Me, ‘Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.’

Men will come to Him,

And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame.

<sup>25</sup> “In the LORD all the offspring of Israel

Will be justified and will glory.”

Reading Isaiah, I sometimes feel like I am reading Paul. Of course, it is the really other way around. It is Paul whose own language is so influenced by Isaiah. Did you notice the last verse, “In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified?” It is very similar to “all Israel will be saved.”

Paul’s reference to covenant in verse 27 is another point of interest. Paul said in 10:4 that Christ is the end of the law, which is the Mosaic Covenant. Which promise of the covenant does Paul foresee as being fulfilled in the future revival of Israel? Is it the promise of the Abrahamic covenant? I think it is the promise of the new covenant. We Gentiles, we readily embrace the New Covenant prophecies as though they had all been given for us. And they do include us, but that’s not how they are initially presented in the Old Testament. The New Covenant was first promised to Israel, not at all to the Gentile world. Listen to the wording of Jeremiah’s famous passage. This is Jeremiah 31:33-34.

<sup>33</sup> “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Do you hear that language that is similar also to what we have here in Romans? “I will remember their sin no more.” The promise of a New Covenant is not given to the church, not initially, or to Gentiles but right here it is given to the house of Israel. Paul has shown that God intended to include us Gentiles. But that is the shocker few were expecting. The covenant is for Israel. The promise is to put the law into the hearts of the Jews. When he says, “their sin I will remember no more” he is speaking of Israelites. This is the great problem Paul has been addressing in these chapters. The New Covenant promises were originally given to Israel, yet Israel has been hardened and excluded. How can God be shown faithful to these promises to his people Israel, not just to the promise to Abraham but to the New Covenant promises? And to call the church Israel and say that fulfills the Lord’s obligation seems to me really a sneaky way to defend God’s faithfulness. Promises were made to the house of Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob. I believe those promises will be kept in an abundant and overflowing way because that is how God keeps his promises

At Pentecost God poured out his Spirit on the Jewish apostles initiating a first fruits of putting his law into their hearts, of fulfilling the promises. But I think we have to look to the future for the fulness of the blessings to Israel to complete the promises that God made to them in the New Covenant.

### **III. The mystery is rooted in God’s faithfulness to his promise (28-29).**

Paul supports the mystery that all Israel from the prophets. He also, in our next couple of verses, points back to the promises made to the patriarchs. So, verse 28 and 29, “<sup>28</sup> From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God’s* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; <sup>29</sup> for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” I am reminded of Jesus’ story about the prodigal son. At the end of the parable, the wild, disobedient, but repentant and humbled son is in the house feasting while the older son stands outside, hurt, jealous and refusing to come in. The older son’s actions reveal his heart. Though he stayed home the whole time, his heart drifted just as far from the father as did the heart of the wayward son. And just as the father came out initially to embrace the younger son, he also chose to leave the feast and come out to the older son. The father did not hate the older son any more than he did the younger son.

To use Paul’s word, the older son is beloved of the father, even though he refuses to receive that love. I believe this parable by Jesus is intended to talk about individuals, but we can also imagine Israel as the older brother. We can extend that language out to the group. And Israel is our older brother, who stands outside, angry and jealous with a heart hardened against the Father. Israel is still beloved.

God’s enduring love for Israel was established in the promises he made to the patriarchs. God used everlasting covenantal language with Abraham when he said, “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son,

and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him (Genesis 17:19).” Paul recognizes the tension. There is a tension. It is true that the Jews of his day opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ and opposed followers of Christ, and especially made it hard on other Jews who decided to follow Jesus. And in that sense, they were enemies to the gospel.

And yet, God still has his eye on the older brother. He made promises. The endurance of the Jews as a race in the promise land is one of the great wonders of history. It shows that God’s eye is on Israel. Driven from the promise land because of famine, Abraham’s descendants moved to Egypt where they were enslaved for four hundred years. Who could believe Israel would become a nation and return to the land of Abraham’s sojourn? And yet, they did. Centuries later in 586 BC Babylon exiled Judah, tearing down the walls of Jerusalem and demolishing the temple. And yet, 70 years later the Jews were back in Jerusalem, the walls rebuilt, and a new temple was built. Once again in 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple burnt to the ground by the Romans. And the Jewish people spent centuries wandering, centuries of flourishing but also of persecution, a persecution that culminated in the Holocaust, one of the world’s most atrocious evils. Six million Jewish men, women and children were killed. Who could believe that Israel would ever make it back, after such a long time and so much hatred and death? And yet, Israel is back again in the land of Abraham’s sojourn. In a spiritual sense, they may be enemies to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but who can doubt that Israel as a people exists by the mighty hand of God. They are beloved. And they still have a part to play in God’s plan.

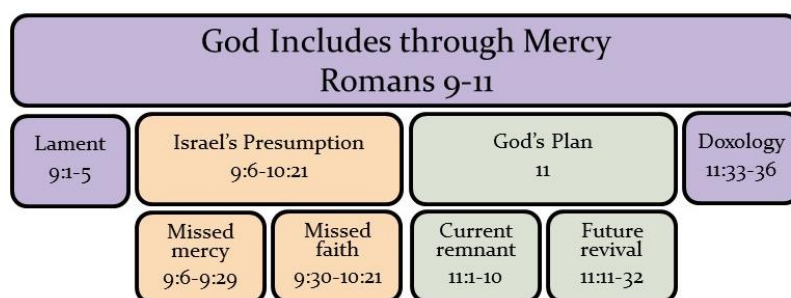
#### **IV. The mystery is representative of God’s impartiality to all peoples (30-32).**

In the final verses of his argument, Paul describes the mystery of Israel’s salvation as representative of God’s impartiality to all peoples. Verses 30-32, <sup>30</sup> “For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. <sup>32</sup> For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”

Verse 30 speaks in broad, general terms about us Gentiles, repeating that the benefit came to us because Israel refused Jesus, “For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience...” The next clause ending verse 30 parallels the clause beginning 31. The closing clause in 30 has this idea, “We have been shown mercy because of their disobedience.” And then the beginning clause of 31 could be understood to say pretty much the same thing but in reverse order. “They have been disobedient for the sake of mercy to us.”

Then we have the final clause of 31, “they also may now be shown mercy.” How is it that the mercy being shown to the Gentiles enables showing mercy to Israel, “that they also may now be shown mercy”? We are considering here salvation history from a very high perspective. It’s like we are way up high, and we are looking through time. God’s mercy to Israel lasted from Abraham to Jesus. That was 2000 years. Then came their disobedience and the gospel spread out to the Gentiles, which lasted another 2000 years, so far. To say that, “they also may now be shown mercy” is to voice the next stage in God’s plan. So, Gentiles were shut out in disobedience as Israel was chosen by mercy. Then Israel was shut out in disobedience as Gentiles were included through mercy. And now, anytime now, once the fulness of the Gentiles is complete, God will again include Israel through mercy.

In justice God has shut out all peoples in their time for their rebellion and wickedness. And God shows mercy to all peoples, inviting them all in through faith in Jesus Christ. “There is no partiality with God (2:11).” God has shut up all in disobedience, so that he may show mercy to all. There is a great mystery. And the great mystery that’s coming, it’s not that the gospel has spread out to Gentiles. That’s shocking, but we are aware of that. The great mystery that is yet to be, is that in a future time all Israel will be saved. God is looking ahead. He has saved a remnant now. He is looking ahead to revival. And you need to know this. And you need to not be wise in your estimation. The blessings you have are by the grace of God, by the mercy of God, not because you are wiser, smarter, better, stronger, richer, whatever. Anybody can be hardened, and anybody can receive mercy.



### Paul's Doxology (11:33-36)

Paul is going to finish out chapter 11 with a doxology. Doxology means a statement of praise. We are getting a statement of praise. Paul began chapter 9 with a lament. And he continues to lament the state of Israel. The doxology does not mean he has gotten over that. But as he stands atop the mountain and surveys the mercy and justice of God through all time to all peoples, he is overcome with awe. The language of his doxology comes, unsurprisingly, from Isaiah 40. Isaiah ended chapter 39 foretelling the coming exile at the hands of the Babylonians. So, Isaiah was looking ahead to pain for Israel. Chapter 40 begins with God exhorting Isaiah to, "Comfort, O comfort my people. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed (40:1-2a)." Israel is then told, "Get yourself up on a high mountain and lift up your voice mightily." From the high point of the mountain, proclaim the wonder of God. Go tell it on a mountain.

Paul, from his mountain top view, surveying all of salvation history, draws on further language in Isaiah as he glories in the magnificence of God. So, he shouts it out in verses 33-36,

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup> Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup> For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Consider the wonder of God through the ages, as he runs out to the prodigal and as he calls the proud to become humble. Consider his justice, his love, his grace and his mercy. Consider too that he left this world in our hands, with all the evil that would follow and all the redemption that would be required. He sees the nations. He sees the smallest child. He knows our hearts, yet he brings us home. He makes promises to stubborn and rebellious people and then makes a way to keep those promises. At the mid-point of history stands a cross, an old, rugged cross. At times we pervert that cross into a symbol of ethnic pride. But for God that cross remains. It remains a statement of incredible love, unending justice and persistent mercy. Let's read Paul's doxology again and glory in the grace and wisdom and love of God. [Repeat Romans 11:33-36.]

### Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as important, confusing, interesting or strange in Romans 11:25-32?
2. What ongoing questions do you have about the phrase, "All Israel will be saved?" Does the option of a future revival of ethnic Israel appeal to you or does that not seem quite right to you?
3. How do you understand Paul's idea of the fulness of the Gentiles? Paul does not give us specifics on what this means? What are some possibilities that come to mind?
4. Paul's big picture of salvation history suggests a current hardening of Israel, an expanding spread of the gospel through the world until the "fulness of the Gentiles is reached", and a future work of God described as "the fullness of Israel (11:12)" or "all Israel being saved." What are some thoughts you have when you try to fit your own country or community or church into the big picture? In what way is it helpful to think about the big picture without getting into the specific details?
5. Paul ends with a statement of praise. What are some truths that come to mind that lead you to praise God when you think of the big picture of his work of redemption through human history?
6. Using Romans 11:33-36 as a model, spend some time in praise.