

## Israel: Past, Present, and Future #7

Romans 11:25-26

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In our study of Israel's past, present, and future, we have considered three Old Testament passages that speak of Israel's future national conversion in coming to Christ (many more might be cited), and now we turn to the New Testament to see the same promises given.

The clearest reference to Israel's future national restoration is found in Romans 11:26: "And so all Israel shall be saved." As one might imagine, there is controversy over the meaning of these words (which we will seek to address), but I submit that the interpretation that teaches a future conversion of Israel as a nation to Christ and teaches that a converted Israel will be brought into the New Covenant Church of Jesus Christ is not an interpretation that originated with dispensationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as some have falsely claimed). I share this historical testimony with you, not as the ground upon which your faith should rest, but as confirmation that sound teachers/scholars of the church long before dispensationalism arrived believed that Romans 11:26 taught the future national conversion of Israel and its inclusion into the one Church of Jesus Christ. Here are a few examples—all interpretations of Romans 11:26.

**The Dutch Annotations** (1637, 1657 in English) note on Romans 11:26:

*all Israel* [that is, not some few, but a very great multitude, and as it were the whole Jewish nation].

**John Diodati** (1576-1649) was a Reformed minister in Geneva and delegate to the Synod of Dordt and he wrote in his commentary:

That is, the body of the people [i.e. of Israel—GLP] in general shall be put again into the way of salvation, and re-established into the communion of the Church.

**Francis Turretin** (1623-1687), whose *Institutes* were used as a standard systematic theology textbook throughout Europe/United States, stated:

Therefore, let it suffice to know that there will be a remarkable conversion of the Jews before the end of the world; not that all will be converted, but that many will, to whom the denomination of "all Israel" can be applied (*Institutes*, 3:587).

**John Brown of Wamphray**, faithful covenanted minister in the Church of Scotland (1610-1679) interprets Romans 11:26 as follows:

The whole body of the nation of the Jews shall be brought from under the plague of blindness, under which they lay, and brought under the gospel and the saving ordinances of Christ into a gospel covenant church-state (*Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 462).

**Wilhemus a Brakel** (1635-1711), a leading minister/teacher in the Dutch Second Reformation declares in his exposition of Romans 11:26:

It would not be the conversion of only a few—of a few individuals here and there—but it would be a conversion of the entire nation. "And so all Israel shall be saved" (*The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 4:518).

**Charles Hodge** of Princeton fame (1797-1878) makes the following comment in expounding Romans 11:26:

Israel here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and all Israel, the whole nation. The

Jews, as a people, are now rejected; as a people, they are to be restored. As their rejection, although national, did not include the rejection of every individual; so their restoration, although in like manner national, need not include the salvation of every individual Jew (*Commentary on Romans*, p. 374).

Let us open to our text that our faith may be firmly grounded upon the truth of God's Word and not upon mere historical testimony. The main points are two questions: (1) What Is the Context Leading Up to Our Text in Romans 11:25-26? (2) Who Is the "ALL ISRAEL" That Shall Be Saved?

## **I. What Is the Context Leading Up to Our Text in Romans 11:25-26?**

A. The Apostle Paul writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Romans 9-11 in order to deal with a most pressing question affecting the Christians in Rome—a question concerning God's redemptive plan for Israel: Does Israel's present unbelief and rebellion against Christ prove that God has completely cast off Israel as a covenanted people/nation?

1. Paul expresses his heavy burden for Israel's salvation in Romans 9:1-4a and Romans 10:1 (for which we should strive). When we come to Romans 11, it is the same Israel (as a people and nation) that Paul addresses. Romans 11 is an overview of God redemptive plan for Israel as a people and nation)—both present and future.

2. Let me be clear: God's redemptive plan for Israel as a nation in the future will not to be distinct from Christ's Church. Israel will be incorporated into Christ's Church. Jesus only has one bride—His Church. Jesus is not a polygamist with two wives (Ephesians 5:25). That is why there is only one olive tree in Romans 11:17—His Visible Church and covenanted people.

B. Israel is Exhibit One in demonstrating God's covenant love and faithfulness to those who are unworthy. In Israel, we see ourselves as well, who are every bit as undeserving and unworthy of God's love and mercy due to our rebellion against His holy Law. Israel's salvation is our salvation. Let us rejoice as we study God's mercy worked out in history.

## **II. Who Is the "ALL ISRAEL" That Shall Be Saved?**

A. When we consider the way in which Paul uses the term "Israel" in the immediate context, there should be no controversy at all as to who this Israel is that shall be saved.

1. There are three main interpretations of who this Israel is.
  - a. It is the new Israel composed of Jews and Gentiles.
  - b. It is a saved remnant of Israel—not the nation.
  - c. It is the greater part of the nation of Israel.

2. As we work through Romans 11, we will see (God willing) why the first two interpretations are not viable, while the last one is.

B. Let's begin by looking at Romans 10:20-21 (Isaiah 65:1-2—salvation to believing Gentiles and judgment to unbelieving Israel)? Remember chapter divisions are not part of the original text. The same people are in view in Romans 11:1 that were just mentioned in Romans 10:21—Israel, as an unbelieving nation, Israel judged by God.

1. The people of Israel in Romans 10:21 (Isaiah 65:2) refers not to the New Israel of the New Testament Church (consisting of both Jews and Gentiles), nor does it refer to the elect remnant of Israel. Thus, neither does Romans 11:1. To the contrary, Paul refers to the vast majority of the people of Israel who have turned their backs to Jesus.

2. Thus, Paul begins Romans 11 with the all-important question as to whether God has totally and permanently cast away His people Israel as a nation.

3. Paul emphatically denies in the strongest terms (“God forbid”) that God has not cast His people, Israel, and points to himself is an Israelite that has been saved by the Lord (Romans 11:1). The salvation of Paul (and other Jews like him) was a token and a first fruit that there was a rich harvest of Jews that would yet be brought to Jesus Christ.

C. Moreover, in the time of Elijah, although the greater part of the nation of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) had rebelled against God’s gracious covenant, God still preserved a remnant of 7,000 (along with Elijah) who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Romans 11:2-4). But note “Israel” in Romans 11:2 refers to the rebellious nation from among which Elijah and the 7,000 are distinguished as a believing remnant. “Israel” is not the New Israel of Jews and Gentiles nor is it the believing remnant.

D. Paul then teaches in Romans 11:5-7 that just as in the days of Elijah so in the days of the apostles there was a remnant that God had chosen to save by His free grace out of the rebellious and unbelieving people and nation of Israel. More first fruits of what is to come. God is not finished with Israel.

1. Here again, “Israel” (Romans 11:7) must refer to the whole body of the rebellious nation since the “election” (i.e. the chosen ones) was a believing remnant taken out of the nation of Israel. “Israel” is not the New Israel (of Jews and Gentiles) nor is it the believing remnant.

2. Now as we come to the end of Romans 11:7, Paul teaches that although this elect remnant out of Israel was being saved and would continue to be saved, the greater part of Israel as a people and nation were blinded (judicially blinded to Christ and the gospel).

3. Romans 11:8-10 continues to address the same judicial blindness that God has presently brought upon Israel as a nation. All of the pronouns in the third person refer to Israel as a people and nation (“them”, “they”, “their”)—not to a believing remnant or to a new Israel.

E. Having demonstrated that Israel as a collective body and nation have been blinded in their unbelief and rebellion against God, note Paul’s question in Romans 11:11. In other words, Paul asks, “Has Israel as a nation stumbled for nothing? Is there no purpose?” Again, Paul responds with the strongest form of denial, “God forbid”. To the contrary, God has wisely intended through Israel’s fall to provoke Israel (as a people and nation) to jealousy by bringing the Gentiles and Gentile nations into His Church by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

F. We now come to two important conditional sentences (in Romans 11:12 and Romans 11:15) that set the stage for what Paul means when he says in Romans 11:26, “And so ALL ISRAEL shall be saved.”

1. The first conditional sentence (Romans 11:12) states in **the IF part of the sentence (the protasis) what is presently true**, “Now IF the fall of them [who is the “them”? Israel as a people and nation—GLP] be the riches of the world [i.e. the spiritual riches of the gospel to the Gentile nations—GLP], and the diminishing of them [the overthrow of Israel as a nation—GLP] the riches of the Gentiles.” And now we move to **the THEN part of the conditional sentence (the apodosis) which holds before us what shall certainly happen in the future**: then (implied) “how much more their fullness” [Israel’s i.e. the people and nation of Israel’s—GLP]. In other words, how much more shall the gospel blessings be realized among the Gentile nations of the world at that time in the future when that same people and nation of Israel that fell and was overthrown due to unbelief and rebellion during the time of Paul (and into the present time as well) shall come to Christ in their fullness as a people and a nation? If the Gentiles were blessed by Israel’s fall, just wait until you see the blessing upon the Gentile nations throughout the whole world when Israel comes to Christ in her fullness as a nation.

2. The second conditional sentence (Romans 11:15) states in **the IF part of the sentence (protasis) what is presently true**, “For IF the casting away of them [who is the “them”? Israel as a people and nation—GLP] be the reconciling of the world [i.e. the gospel of reconciliation going out to the Gentile nations of the world—GLP],” then (implied) “what shall the receiving of them be [the receiving of whom? Israel as a nation when she is received back into a faithful covenant relationship with Christ into Christ’s Church—GLP],

but life from the dead?” In other words, when Israel as a nation is received back into her covenant with the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ, it will be a spiritual resurrection of souls to life throughout the nations of the world in the millennium.

G. In the interest of time, go with me to Romans 11:25 where the last reference to ISRAEL is mentioned just prior to Paul’s statement in Romans 11:26 (“And all ISRAEL shall be saved”).

1. Paul states a mystery in Romans 11:25 (i.e. a truth that is made known only by the revealed will of God in Scripture). Here in the immediately preceding verse Paul states that this spiritual blindness God has sent upon Israel as a nation (at the present time) for her unbelief and rebellion against Christ is “in part”. What does “in part” mean? It means that not every member of Israel has been blinded (for the believing remnant referred to in Romans 11:5-7 have been granted sight to see), and it means that this blindness will continue only “until” the fullness of the Gentile nations comes into Christ’s Church. Once again, ISRAEL refers to the nation of Israel that was blinded by God’s righteous judgment. It’s not the believing remnant or the New Israel that were blinded.

2. I submit that throughout Romans 11, we cannot find one single instance in which “Israel” refers to anything other than the people and nation of Israel. Thus, when we approach Romans 11:26 with any other conception of Israel in mind, I submit we then must be importing that idea into the text and not from the Scriptural context itself.

H. Paul says, “And so [in this way that Paul mentions in the previous verse—GLP] ALL ISRAEL shall be saved.” Paul does not state that a remnant or small part of Israel will be saved in the future (the remnant is already saved as is the new Israel), but that “ALL ISRAEL” shall be saved. This “ALL ISRAEL” that shall be saved is the same nation of Israel that was cast away, that fell away, that was overthrown, and that was blinded—it is that Israel as a nation that will be saved in the future.

I. Those who do not see a future conversion of Israel as a people and nation in being brought into the New Covenant Church of Jesus Christ tend to focus upon the believing remnant in Romans 11 as being the realization of this prophecy. However, the believing remnant is not the realization, but the first fruits that the harvest is coming. It may be discouraging to believing Jews at the present time that there are so few that have come to Christ, but there is coming a glorious time of worldwide gospel blessing and prosperity which will usher into the Christ’s Church the people and nation of Israel. Oh, how I would love to read the headlines that will fill the newspapers and the internet sites throughout the world at that time: Israel comes to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ! Lord hasten that day!

J. Let us who are Gentile believers understand that we are presently just a remnant of the fullness of the Gentile nations that will be brought to Christ in the future. We, too, can look at the relatively few that seem to be faithfully following Christ. We can become very discouraged at the corruption and tyranny in the nations (and even among nations bound by solemn covenants with the Lord). We, too, are a first fruits of the great harvest that shall come to Christ from among the Gentile nations. This is the same theme we have witnessed in Zechariah 2:10-12; Isaiah 19:25-28—Israel will be brought to Christ as a Christian nation and the Gentile nations of the world will be brought to Christ as Christian nations; and all will be in the same olive tree of Christ’s Church professing the same doctrine, worship, and church government to the glory of Christ.

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