

GOD'S PEOPLE? SAVED! (PT. 1)
ROMANS 11:25-27

How have you spent your COVID? It's not the only thing we have done, but we spent at least four days attacking trees and shrubs in our yard — trimming, cutting down, and then digging out roots. By my count, I have dug out 10-12 tree stumps of varying sizes. Shovels (spades and hand shovels), various sized clippers, a hatchet, and when things got desperate, even my chain saw. Then last Sunday after exhausting all those tools and raising three blisters on my hands, I took drastic action against one last stump. **Fire.**



One neighbor told Raye Jeanne the next day, "I saw y'all had a campfire in the front yard yesterday — it looked like so much fun." I was covered in sweat, dirt, blisters, and smoke. It wasn't fun as much as it was a tactical squad against a belligerent enemy. But I won. The stump is gone.

As you think about the progress of the gospel, it might be tempting to think about the various opponents of the gospel and think that God thinks about them the way I think about my tree stumps — "It's time to get rid of them and I will do everything I need to do to rid Myself of them — even fire." We might think that about people in general, but also about the nation of Israel in particular. Has God given up on Israel? Has he "burned out the stump" of Israel and His promises to Israel and moved on to Gentiles and the church? Or is there still hope for Israel?

In his ultimate chapter on God's sovereignty in salvation, Romans 11, Paul culminates his argument in this chapter and section (chs. 9-11) by saying in vv. 25-32 —

ISRAELITES HAVE REBELLED AGAINST GOD. BUT GOD WILL YET SAVE HIS PEOPLE, ISRAEL.

In this passage, we find **three truths** about the "mystery" of Israel's salvation:

1. A Mystery REVEALED (v. 25a)

2. The Mystery EXPLAINED (vv. 25b-26a)

- ✓ Israel was partially hardened temporarily (v. 25b)
- ✓ Gentiles are receiving from Israel's blessings (v. 25c)
- ✓ Israel will be saved (vv. 26a)

3. The Mystery AFFIRMED (v. 26b-27)

- ✓ God will provide a deliverer for Israel (v. 26b)
- ✓ God will forgive Israel's sins (v. 26c, 27b)
- ✓ God has given an unconditional, unilateral promise (v. 27a)

Lessons Learned:

ISRAELITES HAVE REBELLED AGAINST GOD. BUT GOD WILL YET SAVE HIS PEOPLE, ISRAEL.

1. A Mystery REVEALED (v. 25a)

- In concluding his discussion about God's sovereignty in salvation, Paul says he does *not want* the Romans **to be uninformed** about **this mystery**. That is, he wants them to *be informed*.
 - ✓ He wants them to understand a mystery. Biblically, a mystery is a truth about God's will or working which has been hidden, but is now being revealed (e.g., Rom. 16:25).
 - ✓ In the NT, this mystery is typically about the gospel in general and often about the relationship between Israel and the church in particular (Eph. 3:3-6).
 - ✓ That is the particular mystery he has in mind in this chapter — (v. 25b).
- Why does Paul want them to know this mystery? To keep them humble —
 - ✓ **So that you will not be wise in your own estimation.** He does not say that he doesn't want them to be wise. But he doesn't want them to have a self-exalted view of themselves. He doesn't want them to overestimate who and what they are. He wants them to think rightly (anticipating 12:3, 16).
 - ✓ Aside: have you ever noticed how often Scripture warns against pride? Cf. Mk. 7:22; Lk. 14:11; 18:14; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3, 8; Js. 4:6, 10; 1 Pt. 3:8; 5:5-6; 1 Jn. 2:16.
 - ✓ Everything we have in salvation we have only because of grace and never because of our own merit or accomplishments. That is true of Israel, and it is also true of Gentiles who have received from God's promises to Israel. We must beware of committing the same prideful sins of the Israelites — they assumed salvation because of their status as chosen people; the Gentile might be tempted to assume salvation because of the supposed status as Israel's "replacement."
 - ✓ Paul wants the Romans and us to know that there is no wisdom in self-exaltation. So he reveals the mystery of God's work of salvation...

2. The Mystery EXPLAINED (vv. 25b-26a)

• Israel was partially hardened temporarily (v. 25b)

- ✓ When Paul talks about **hardening**, he is referring to those who resist God — they are firmly set against God, choosing to ignore Him, saying "no" to his demands. It is a commitment of one's total being against God — intellect, heart/mind, and actions. Inwardly and outwardly he is against God.
- ✓ Those who are hardened are completely hardened, but not every Israelite is hardened.
- ✓ That Israel was **partially hardened** refers to the number of Israelites who are hardened. Not all Israelites rebelled against God (cf. Paul's own salvation, v. 1). But many were (vv. 7b-10).

- ✓ Even though the majority of the nation rejected Christ, even in His day, a remnant existed. So there is a limitation on the *number* of those who are hardened.
- ✓ There is also a limitation on the *duration* of the hardening — only until the elect Gentiles are saved. In other words, there is a time when Israel will still be saved and grafted back in by faith (v. 23).
- ✓ Theologian William G. T. Shedd has noted — “The reprobation is total, whenever it occurs, but it does not occur to every individual of the nation. The qualification is extensive, not intensive; denoting the number of the hardened, not the degree of the hardening. The reprobate are only a part of the Jews.” [Romans] That’s encouraging and hopeful (for Israel, and us!).
- ✓ Paul is reaffirming this truth to keep the Gentiles from pride and arrogance. And to remind them of God’s faithfulness to His promise to His chosen people.

- Gentiles are receiving from Israel’s blessings (v. 25c)

- ✓ While Israel is being hardened (with a remnant), the hardening has a time limit — it will only last **until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**. That is, there is a number of Gentiles that God has destined for salvation, and when those are all saved, then Israel will be redeemed.
- ✓ Paul’s expectation is that this fullness is coming soon (13:11-12). How many will be saved? Only the Lord knows that. But we do know that all He has chosen will be saved (8:30-31), and when those are saved, then Israel will also be saved.
- ✓ Paul’s point? The fullness of the Gentiles will be the end of Israel’s hardening.
- ✓ That is a reminder that Gentiles and the church do not supplant Israel; we merely get to experience the blessing of the promises of Israel by participating with them (v. 17; Gen. 12:3).

- Israel will be saved (vv. 26a)

- ✓ This verse has led me to tears of gratitude many times as I have studied this chapter. If this section is the culmination of Paul’s teaching on God’s sovereignty in salvation, then this is the pinnacle of this section. This is the mountain top of God’s sovereignty in Israel’s salvation. *Paul answers 4 Qs:*
- ✓ *How will they be saved? And so* (“In this way”). In vv. 11-24 Paul outlined the process for Israel —
 - a remnant will be preserved as a sign of God’s faithfulness (v. 11a),
 - Gentiles will be given Messianic salvation (v. 11b),
 - Israel will be provoked to jealousy for their promised salvation (v. 11c),
 - and Israel will be saved (vv. 23, 26).
 - When saying **In this way**, Paul is not focused on “when” as much as “the means of Israel’s salvation” — the process through which they will experience their covenanted promises.
- ✓ *Who will be saved? Israel*, the Jewish people, ethnic Israel that had received God’s covenants. In Romans 9-11 Paul uses the term “Israel” 10x and it always refers to ethnic Israel (e.g., 9:6; 10:19, 21). He is not speaking about Gentiles or the church — the contrasts throughout this chapter make that clear (e.g., 17). To call the church “Israel,” would actually stimulate pride he has warned against.

- ✓ *How many will be saved?* **All Israel.** He means the totality of the nation — “the nation, as a nation,” though perhaps not every single individual Israelite. The term “all Israel” is used 148x in the OT; a number of times it is used “corporately,” to refer to the nation, though not every person (e.g., **1 Kgs. 12:1; 2 Chron. 12:1**; Dan. 9:11).
- ✓ *What will be the means of their salvation?* Christ, the **Deliverer** (Redeemer, **v. 26b**). Salvation is always and only in Jesus Christ. Cf. 1:16-17. Whether looking forward to the coming Messiah (like Abraham and David), or looking back to the crucified and resurrected Messiah and Savior (like us), salvation is always and only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (**4:16-17; 10:12-13; 11:23**).
- ✓ *How do we know they will be saved?* **All Israel will be saved.** God has promised it, that's how. Though they are not saved yet, God's promise makes it a certainty that they will be.
- ✓ And the OT affirms that same reality...

3. The Mystery **AFFIRMED** (v. 26b-27)

- **God will provide a deliverer for Israel (v. 26b)**

- ✓ In these verses, Paul quotes from **Is. 59:20-21**.
- ✓ In that chapter, Isaiah is asserting God's power to save Israel (and fulfill His promise to Abraham). His arm (power) is not too short to save (**v. 1**), even though the nation is filled with sin (**vv. 2ff**).
- ✓ There was no one to save Israel (**v. 16**), so He Himself interceded (**v. 16b**). He acted by providing a Redeemer, to pay for (buy) Israel's sin (**v. 20**). This Redeemer will come *to* Zion (Israel/Jerusalem); Paul also emphasizes that He will come *from* Zion (He will be a Messiah from and for Israel).
- ✓ While Isaiah doesn't specify that this Redeemer is Jesus Christ, Paul clearly understands that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise; **2 Cor. 1:10; Col. 1:13; 1 Th. 1:10**.
- ✓ Both Isaiah and Paul make clear that Israel's salvation is not something she accomplishes herself; it is a gift of God's grace alone, as salvation always is.
- ✓ Israel and all mankind was enslaved to sin; God provided a Redeemer who brought salvation from sin:

- **God will forgive Israel's sins (v. 26c, 27b)**

- ✓ This redeemer will **remove all ungodliness from Jacob** (Israel). The sense is that God will produce repentance from all ungodliness. All their rebellion against God is taken away. This is no political Messiah, but a Messiah from sin.
- ✓ Paul amplifies that idea in 27b: **when I take away their sins** (a quotation from **Is. 27:9**).
 - The heart of salvation is that God removes our sins and their penalty (Heb. 10:4).
 - God removes the penalty of sin and the power of sin (Rom. 6). Every violation (**sins**, pl.) of the Law is removed from the sinner and he is made clean (**Is. 1:18**)
 - It is notable that in the context of Is. 27 that the prophet is speaking of temporary judgment against Israel (**vv. 7-8**) that will ultimately produce much fruit in her (**v. 6**).
- ✓ Even in the OT when Israel was in captivity, salvation and forgiveness are promised.

- God has given an unconditional, unilateral promise (v. 27a)

- ✓ God will accomplish this as an expression of His **covenant**. Notice that it is *His* covenant.
 - He unconditionally made it with Abraham and Israel (meaning they do not merit it, **Gen. 12:1ff**).
 - He unilaterally made it (that only He was a guarantor of it, **Gen. 15:12, 17-18**).
 - He irrevocably made it — it cannot be rescinded (**Gen. 17:7-8**).
- ✓ As Paul and Isaiah use the word **covenant**, they are probably also thinking of the expansion of the Abrahamic covenant into the New Covenant — the spiritual blessings that come to and from Israel (**Jer. 31:33-34**). This is the promise of forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Spirit (**Lk. 22:20**).
- ✓ Salvation for Israel is an unalterable promise from God, attested to by His name. He has made the promise and He will keep the promise. That's a promise given in the OT, and now in the NT.
- ✓ God is faithful to accomplish what He has said to Israel (and us).

Lessons Learned:

- ✓ One theologian has said Romans 11:25-32 “constitute[s] one of the most important prophecies in the New Testament.” [Shedd] I think he is right. We do well to remember the lessons of these vv.
- ✓ **Remember grace.**
 - Everything we have is a gift of God's grace. We merit nothing but His wrath. We deserve none of His kindness. But when we are saved, we get none of His wrath and all His kindness. That should make us humble and grateful.
 - Not every hardening is a permanent hardening. God is able to soften the hardest heart (1 Tim. 1:15). He can soften hearts at the last minute (Lk. 23:42-43).
- ✓ **Remember glory.** When God gives grace, it is not so that we are put on display, but so that *He* is put on display and glorified. When we receive grace from Him, we should not only turn away from pride, but we should turn towards exalting and honoring God (which is what Paul does, **vv. 33ff**).
- ✓ **Remember Israel.** Our salvation is ultimately for the purpose of Israel's salvation (vv. 11, 31). They are God's people. Pray for and evangelize and yearn for and expect their salvation.
- ✓ **Remember the end is coming.** Every time a Gentile trusts Christ, we have moved one person closer to the completion of God's plan. There is a limit to our time on earth; there is a limit to God's patience with sinners. The end is coming (soon). We need to live that way (**13:11-12**):
 - If you have not trusted Christ, He is patient, but there is a limit to that patience (**2:4-5**). You do well to repent of your sin and place your faith in Christ today.
 - If you have trusted Christ, because the end is coming, live with urgent holiness (**2 Pt. 3:10-13**).
- ✓ **Remember that God remembers.** When He makes promises, He cannot forget them. He remembers — which means that He is unerringly faithful in keeping those promises.

BENEDICTION: **Romans 11:33-36**