

God's Program and Promises for Israel

Romans 11:25-36

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²⁸ Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? ³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Background Notes

If you were a 1st century Christian reading the letter of Paul to the Romans, here is the logical question you would ask when you finished reading chapters 1 through 8: "What about God's plans and program for the Jewish people?" The Old Testament is loaded with promises for Israel, but it seems, after reading Romans 1-8, that God must have changed His mind about Israel. Israel is hardly mentioned in Romans 1-8. And in the 1st century the gospel was going out to the whole world – any sinner may receive salvation and enter God's family by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of Romans 8 we learn that all who come to faith have been foreknown and predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ: *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren"* (Romans 8:29). And in Romans 8:35-39, we see that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. What great promises to the believer!

But wait a minute! What about those **unconditional** promises made to Israel in the Old Testament? Where do they fit into the great truths of Romans 8? Did God change His mind? And if God has withdrawn or changed His promises to the Jewish people of the Old Testament, what guarantee is there that the promises He has made to New Testament believers in Christ won't be withdrawn or changed? I think you can see what logical questions would come to your mind as a first century reader of the letter to the Romans - and also as a reader of Romans today.

Well, Paul anticipated these questions, and in Romans 9-11 he gave the answers: God has **not** changed His plans for Israel, and God has **not** withdrawn His promises to the nation of Israel. God's sovereign plans for Israel have always included the fact that Israel would be temporarily set aside because of their unbelief, and the Gentiles would be brought into the place of privilege and favor. But God's sovereign plans have also always included the fact that Israel would return to the Lord in the future, and the promises of the Old Testament to the Jewish people would then be literally fulfilled. Look at the end of verses 28-29: "*Concerning the gospel they [Israel] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*" God's promises to Israel are still good – they are still intact. God doesn't make promises and then take them back!

Doctrinal Points

1. God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles is classified as a "mystery."

Verse 25: "*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*"

A "**mystery?**" When we use the word "mystery" today we usually mean something we can't figure out, or a detective or spy novel. Well, that's not the way the word "mystery" is used in the Bible. Specifically, a biblical mystery is truth that was concealed in the Old Testament, but is revealed in the New Testament. The Church, for example, is called a "mystery" – it is a truth that was concealed in the Old Testament, but it has been revealed in the New Testament.

In Romans 11, God's sovereign plan for the Jews and the Gentiles is classified as a "mystery." Glimpses of the plan are certainly seen in Old Testament prophecy, but the plan is completely revealed in the New Testament. What is that plan? The end of verse 25 tells us: "*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*"

Because of unbelief, a "partial blindness" or partial hardening has happened to Israel. Note, a **partial** hardening! There has always been a remnant of Jewish believers (as we see in the first part of Romans 11), but as a nation Israel has been set aside from the place of privilege and favor in God's dealings with mankind – **temporarily**. They are "enemies of God" in that sense (v28) -- that is, they are temporarily alienated from God's place of favor. But notice that it is "for your sake" - for the sake of bringing Gentiles into the family of God.

How long will Israel be set aside? Answer: Until "*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*" (v25). When will that be? Answer: When the last member has been added to the church and the Lord takes the church out of this world at the rapture, then God will again focus on the nation of Israel. Israel once more will be in the place of privilege, as we see from the illustration of the olive tree in the earlier part of Romans 11. As a result, there will be a great spiritual awakening in Israel, and many Jews will turn to the Lord. Who are the Jews who will turn to the Lord? They are not the believing Jews of today, Jews who have believed in Jesus – they are, of course, part of the Church. No, these are the believing Jews of

the Tribulation period, the period after the Church has left this earth at the rapture. The nation of Israel itself will turn back to the Lord at that time. That's the meaning of v26-27: *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷ For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."*

The "Israel" mentioned here is **not** the Church -- or even all the saved Jews in the Church. No, the "Israel" here is the **nation of Israel** after the Lord has caught up the Church from the earth at the rapture. This Israel is the believing "remnant" of Romans 9:27, *"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved."* This is the Israel of Romans 11:26 -- the "all Israel" who will be saved. It's the believing remnant of that day, which will then characterize the nation. God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles is classified as a "mystery."

2. God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles is characterized by mercy.

Verses 30-31: *"For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy."* Notice that God's plans in temporarily setting Israel aside involves mercy, and God's plans for showing favor to Israel once again involves mercy. God's sovereign plan for both Jew and Gentile is not dependent on some kind of merit on the part of either the Jew or on the part of the Gentile. No, God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles is characterized by **mercy!**

Verse 32: *"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all."* The phrase *"for God has committed to them all to disobedience"* doesn't mean that God forced all Jews and all Gentiles to be disobedient. No! The idea is that both Jews and Gentiles **did** disobey. There's only one way out for either Jew or Gentile -- **God's mercy!** And the end of verse 32 - *"...that He might have mercy on all"* -- doesn't mean that all Jews and Gentiles will be saved. The idea here is that **in all cases**, for the Jew and the Gentile, salvation is **only** because of **God's mercy**. God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles is characterized by mercy.

Practical Application

Let your study of doctrine result in doxology!

In verses 33-36, Paul concluded this great chapter with a doxology of praise. This doxology is really the conclusion of the doctrinal division of Romans, chapters 1 through 11. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, we have God's wonderful plan of salvation revealed. These chapters also contain the doctrine of election -- not just of nations, but also of individuals. If a sovereign God chooses who will be saved, this is hard, difficult doctrine -- and yet Paul was able to rejoice in this doctrine, as well as all the other doctrines of the Christian faith in Romans 1-11.

Can you rejoice in this doctrine? We know from 2 Peter 3:9 that God is not willing for any to perish, but that all should come to repentance -- and yet we have the teaching of Romans 9 that God, in His sovereignty, "elects" who will be saved. In verse 33, Paul acknowledged that these truths are too deep for us to fully appreciate or figure out.

In verses 34-35 we have quotes from the Old Testament, and the point here is that **we must “let God be God.”** ³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? ³⁵ “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?”* Let God be God!

Let your study of doctrine result in doxology, as we let God be God! *“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”* A final burst of praise to the glory of God! Paul’s study of doctrine resulted in doxology. What about us? Let your study of doctrine result in doxology!