

A Study in the Book of Romans

27

Romans 11:25-36

Key Verses

“ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ”

Because of their faith, the Gentiles had experienced the kindness of God and had been grafted into Abraham and his Promise (**Galatians 3:29**). Now it seems natural, says Paul, that if the Jews come out of their unbelief and enter into faith, they too will once again be grafted in, for if it was possible for a wild, alien olive to be grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much easier it will be for the tree's own natural branches to be grafted in again.

Read Romans 11:24

Paul has been sharing the hope that there is even now for every Jew, because the Gospel is a message to the individual. He has made it clear in his letter to the Romans that the Gospel is for all – both Jew *and* Gentile. The wall of division between Jew and Gentile has been broken down in Christ and they are now “one man” in God's eyes (**Ephesians 2:13-18**). This had resulted in countless multitudes of Gentiles turning to the Lord.

Paul has also shared an inkling of something he sees in the future (**11:12,15**), and this he now sets out to enlarge upon. Not only is the door continually open for each *individual* (whether Jew or Gentile) to be “grafted in” because of his faith in Christ, but Paul reveals, from Scripture, prophecies concerning great multitudes of Jews turning to Christ in the last days!

Introduction

The Gospel's Three Revelations

The Gospel's Three Answers

The Gospel's Answer to Israel

The Gospel in Action

Conclusion

Read Romans 11:25

To keep the Gentiles from becoming conceited, he shares with them a “mystery” concerning the destiny of the Jews. By a “mystery” he means a truth that cannot be known by human reasoning, but only by direct revelation from God. Short years later, while a prisoner in Rome, he was later to expound in **Ephesians 3:2-6** on this mystery of the Gospel:

“Surely you have heard about...the mystery made known to me by revelation... In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel *the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*”

He now unfolds the “mystery” concerning the Jews in three parts:

Israel’s hardening is only for a time

If Israel’s temporary stumbling had been prophetically foretold, so also had their ultimate restoration, and Paul quotes **Isaiah 59:20-21** and **Isaiah 27:9** to prove his point (**11:26-27**). The prophet Jeremiah also had foretold this in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**:

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

Just as the Old Testament prophets had seen ahead and prophesied of the great response of the Gentiles to the Gospel, so Paul looks ahead and prophesies of a great turning to Christ by Israel in the last days.

We need to understand that the hardening of the heart of most Jews has to do with five things:

- **The issue of the crucifixion** – This was the original stumbling block for first century Jews, and remains a major stumbling block for twenty-first century Jews.
- **The issue of the Torah** – For religious Jews, this is a major issue. As a Jew, Paul holds that “Christ is *the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for *everyone* (Jew and Gentile) who believes.”

- **The issue of faith** – This is one of the biggest stumbling blocks, since it has to do with the *means* of entrance into the kingdom of God. The Gospel declares that the way is open to all, through faith, without the need of circumcision or observance of the Law. As Paul explained, the Jews stumbled over the “stumbling stone” “[b]ecause they pursued [righteousness] not by faith but as if it were by works.”
- **The issue of Christian history** – There have been almost twenty centuries since the message of the Gospel first fell on Jewish ears, and during those twenty centuries Jews have been consistently persecuted by so-called Christians. This weight of history is a major barrier for the Jew who seeks to consider Christ. Even the word “Christ” (the Greek word corresponding to the Hebrew *mashiach* – Messiah) is a stumbling block. Many Jews do not view Jesus Christ (“Yeshua ha’Mashiach” in Hebrew) as a Jew but rather as an icon of Christian persecution.
- **The issue of Jewish identity** – Down through the centuries of Christian persecution, tremendous pressure was brought to bear on Jews to convert to Christianity. But unlike in the first century, after the second century, for a Jew to convert to Christianity meant a loss of Jewish identity. Many Jews suffered martyrdom, quoting the *Sh’ma* proclamation of **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** in their dying breath, rather than recant their Jewish faith. It is therefore not easy for a Jew today to embrace faith in Yeshua ha’Mashiach without a sense of betraying his Jewish heritage. It is for this reason that many Jewish believers today do not even call themselves “Christians,” but rather “Messianic Jews.”

For there to be a mass turning of Jews to Christ, there must first be a softening of the heart. Only God can do this. For just as the first-century Jews “were hardened,” even so God will soften the hearts of Jews in the last days.

Until the full number of Gentiles has come in

This does not mean the *totality* of the Gentiles – it is obvious from the rest of Scripture that not *all* Gentiles will come into the kingdom of God. Rather it refers to the “multitudes” of Gentiles – the full number of all those who will respond by faith. The harvest of the full complement of the Gentiles is to be followed by the bringing in of the “fullness” of the Jews.

Read Luke 21:24

The Lord Jesus spoke of when “the times of the Gentiles” will be fulfilled. This appears to refer to the end of this age, when the Lord Jesus will return in glory. At the time of this writing, the “times of the Gentiles” have not yet been completed, since there are still many Gentiles turning to Christ. But there will come a time when “the full number of Gentiles” will have come in. At that time, there will come a massive turning of Jews to faith in Jesus, their Messiah.

In **Matthew 24:14**, Jesus prophesied:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony *to all nations*, and *then* the end will come.”

The word “nations” in the original Greek is *ethnos*, meaning “ethnic groups.” The Hebrew version of this word is *goyim*, which literally means the Gentiles. Even before his crucifixion, Jesus was already letting his disciples know that the “gospel of the kingdom” that they were currently preaching exclusively to the Jews (note **Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24**) would soon be preached to the Gentiles, and that “the end” would be marked by the completion of this preaching to “all [Gentile] nations.”

So all Israel will be saved

In the same way that the “full number of the Gentiles” did not mean *all* Gentiles, so “all Israel” is an expression which does not mean “every Jew without a single exception,” but rather “Israel as a whole” – the full complement of those Jews who will be saved by faith in their Messiah.

The Jews as a people are now estranged from God. This did not happen *en masse*, but rather because multitudes of *individual* Jews within the nation rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Although their rejection has been termed “national,” it was, in fact, the rejection of many unbelieving individuals. This rejection did not include *every* individual Jew – for some did believe. In this way we see the temporary rejection of the nation of Israel as whole did not mean that every Jew was individually rejected.

The restoration of Israel will be in the same way. It will not be national salvation any more than it had been with the Gentiles. The Gentiles were not saved because they were Gentiles but because they believed (in fact, many of them did not believe, and so were not saved). So it will be with the Jews.

Remember, Paul is not saying, “*Every Jew* will be saved.” Rather, he is saying, “*All Israel* will be saved.” The salvation of Israel will not be as a nation but as multitudes of individuals within that nation turning in personal faith to Jesus. Yet so great will be the numbers turning to Jesus within Israel that it will indeed be a “national” revival! And so Paul’s words will be fulfilled: “All Israel will be saved.”

Israel’s Election

Read Romans 11:28-29

In this verse, Paul makes a clear distinction between the Gospel itself and Israel’s “election.” “As far as *the Gospel* is concerned,” he writes, “[the Jews] are enemies on your account.” But, he says, this makes absolutely no different to Israel’s *election*.

The “election” of Israel has to do with the natural descendency of the Jews from the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because of God’s love for these faithful

* This was the case in the early first century, when the Jews were the primary persecutors of the early believers. But today, this has changed. Jews no longer persecute Christians, and therefore are no longer “enemies on your account.”

men and his promises to them, his love is still extended toward their natural descendants. Even though they prove unfaithful, God remains faithful! (**11:28-29**).

As the *New Living Translation* words Paul's explanation in **11:28-29**:

“Many of the Jews are now enemies of the Good News. But this has been to your benefit, for God has given his gifts to you Gentiles. Yet the Jews are still his chosen people because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.”

This is absolutely vital for us to understand. Even though Israel has experienced a temporary hardening and rejection, this has absolutely no impact on their election as God's people, since election has to do with God's choice, not man's works. Israel's election is all about God's faithfulness to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the forefathers of the Jews. And God *will* keep his promise to them, despite the unfaithfulness of their descendants.

The Gentiles to Bless Israel

Read Romans 11:30-31

The Gentiles, from a place of disobedience, had received God's mercy, and God had used the disobedience of Israel to get the message of his forgiveness to them. Now, says Paul, the Jews are in the same position as the Gentiles were – in disobedience – and it will be through the Church (including multitudes of forgiven Gentiles) that God's message of mercy will come to them!

Read Colossians 1:27

In previous modules, we've examined “the glorious riches” of the mystery of the Gospel, which Paul says is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” But notice the beginning of the verse. Paul says:

“...God has chosen to make known *among the Gentiles* the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

It is *among the Gentiles* that God has chosen to make known the glorious riches of the mystery of the Gospel. But God has not blessed the Gentiles just for their own sake. He has blessed the Gentiles so that they may turn around and bless the Jews in return. These “glorious riches” (which he has just described in **Romans 11:12**) are not there just for us to revel in. They are there for us to *share*.

Read Ephesians 3:8

Once again, Paul tells us that the “unsearchable riches of Christ” have been preached to the Gentiles. In **Ephesians 2:11-13**, Paul had just finished reminding the Ephesian Gentiles of the matchless grace of God extended to their lives:

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you were separate

from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

The condition of the Gentile nations before Christ was a state of being “without hope and without God in the world.” We were excluded from both the Covenant of Law (through Moses) and the Covenant of Grace (through Abraham). But then Jesus came and “preached peace to you who were far away (the Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (the Jews)” (**Ephesians 2:17**). He broke down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile – the Law (**Ephesians 2:14-15**) – and “create[d] in himself one new man out of the two” (**Ephesians 2:15**). Now, in Christ, both Jew and Gentile have the same access to the Father, as described in **Ephesians 2:18**:

“For through him *we both* (Jew and Gentile) have access to the Father by *one Spirit*.”

This is the state that we Gentiles now find ourselves in. We have been taken from the state of being “without hope and without God in the world” to a state of being *with* hope and *with* God in the world! Believing Gentiles have been joined, through Christ, to Israel’s hope and Israel’s God! And in **Ephesians 2:19**, Paul goes on to describe the consequences of this new condition in God:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but *fellow citizens with God’s people* and members of God’s household.”

In his letters to the Gentile churches, Paul continually remind his converts that they are not independent of their Jewish roots. For Paul constantly seeks to impress upon the Gentile believers that the Gentiles have not been blessed *independently* of the Jews, but rather *because* of the Jews. In **Galatians 3:8-9**, Paul explains:

“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed *through you*.’ So those who have faith *are blessed along with Abraham*, the man of faith.”

Then in **Galatians 3:14**, he continues:

“He redeemed us *in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles* through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

As Gentiles, we are blessed because of Abraham! It is only because we have been written into the covenant God made with Abraham (by stepping into Christ) that we now receive the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Read Romans 15:8-9

Here Paul explains that Christ “has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth.” His goal in his sacrifice upon the Cross was “to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy...”

This was why Paul, as he explains in **15:25-27**, was on his way to Jerusalem at the time of writing his letter to the Roman Christians. He was taking with him a financial gift that had been collected from many of the Gentile churches in his care, an expression of their love for the mother church at Jerusalem. Paul explains:

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”

There will come a time, however, when the *spiritual* harvest reaped among the Gentiles will begin to be sown back into Israel. All the “unsearchable riches of Christ” will then be rediscovered by the Jews. And what joy will result! For at that time, the Gentiles will have the greatest privilege of all – blessing Israel back *spiritually* for all the blessings they have received through Israel!

Results of Israel’s Return

To get the full picture of what will happen on the great day of Israel’s return, let’s look again at **11:12** and **11:15**. Paul compares the wonderful blessing that came to the world of the Gentiles in his day to what it will be like in the last days when the Jews will receive the Gospel.

If it means riches now, Paul is saying, how much greater riches then! If it means reconciliation to God now, it will be resurrection life then!* The whole world will be blessed abundantly in that day! So it is a glorious complete circle – Israel blessing the Gentiles – the Gentiles, in turn, blessing Israel – and, once again, Israel blessing the Gentiles! And God’s purpose in it all is revealed in **11:32**: That *all* men – without distinction – may receive his mercy!

All Praise and Glory to God!

As he closes **chapter 11**, Paul has now completed his panorama of God’s plan of redemption. He has presented clearly all the wonders of the Gospel, all the truths of our salvation, all the glories of our ultimate call and destiny, all the wisdom of God’s dealings with mankind – Jew and Gentile alike. Now he pours forth a tribute of praise with a heart filled to overflowing with adoration, marveling at the unsearchable greatness of God. In a grand doxology, voicing his wonder of God’s wisdom in the Gospel, Paul declares forth:

* Indeed, if Paul is saying that the great turning of Jews to Jesus occurs just before the return of Christ, as he seems to indicate, then he may be referring in **Romans 11:15** to the resurrection of the righteous that will take place at the time of Christ’s return.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

Albert Barnes has this to say about the meaning of “depth” as Paul uses it:

“The word ‘depth’ is applied in the Scriptures to anything vast and incomprehensible. As the abyss or the ocean is unfathomable, so the word comes to denote what words cannot express, or what we cannot comprehend.”¹

This meaning is reflected in J. B. Phillips’ rendition of **11:33** in *The New Testament in Modern English*:

“Frankly, I stand amazed at the unfathomable complexity of God’s wisdom and God’s knowledge. How could man ever understand his reasons for action, or explain his methods of working?”

Paul’s awe at the wonder of what God is like and what he has done rings forth in these words. His love, his grace, his mercy and his glory is unfathomable! Hidden beneath the simplicity of the Gospel (and indeed it *is* simple) is a depth that cannot be fully plumbed.

Notice that Paul expresses his wonder at “the riches...of God.” What does he say are the riches of God? Two glorious things – the *wisdom* of God and the *knowledge* of God! These are also the two things Paul tells the Ephesians Christians he is constantly praying God will give them (**Ephesians 1:17-18**). As the *New Living Translation* translates Paul’s prayer:

“...I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called...”

The wisdom of God

The wisdom of God involves an insight into the *ways* of God – the how and the why of what God does (**Exodus 33:13; Psalm 25:4**). **Psalm 103:7** tells us that, although the children of Israel saw God do many great miracles on their behalf, they only knew his acts – his outward actions. Moses, however, knew his ways – the reasons *why* God did the things he did. Paul explains God’s wisdom, step by step, in **Ephesians 3:8-11**:

“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Yet even though God's desire is to share his wisdom – the understanding of his ways – with us, we must remember that this wisdom has great depths, far beyond our capability to fully fathom. Indeed, we will be spending the rest of eternity plumbing the depths of God's great wisdom in the Gospel.

The knowledge of God

The knowledge of God involves an insight into the very *heart* of God. Rather than being just an *academic* knowledge of God, however, it is an *intimate* knowledge of him. As we have seen in past lessons, it is this ongoing knowledge of God that fuels our growth into the likeness of Christ. We see the role that the knowledge of God plays in our Christian growth in **2 Peter 1:2-3**:

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance *through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through our knowledge of him* who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

Read 2 Peter 3:18

And the marvel of the Gospel is that all these riches – all this wisdom and all this knowledge of God – are found hidden in Christ himself. Paul himself declares this in **Colossians 1:29-2:3**:

“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me...My purpose is...that they may have *the full riches of complete understanding* in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*”

The Unsearchable Paths of God

Extending his exclamation of awe at God's wisdom, Paul exclaims:

“How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

The method that God has chosen to save mankind – called the Gospel – is so far beyond the best that the human mind can devise (see **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**) that Paul calls God's judgments “unsearchable.” As Adam Clarke commented:

“Who can pretend to penetrate the counsels of God, or fathom the reasons of his conduct? His designs and his counsels are like himself, infinite; and, consequently, inscrutable.”²

Isaiah 55:8-9 explains just how “unsearchable” God's judgments truly are. Through Isaiah, God proclaims:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”

Who could have predicted that God would send his own Son to die in the place of

all mankind? Who could have foreseen that Israel would reject her own Messiah? And who would have thought that out of this rejection, the Gospel would spread with such speed among the Gentile nations? These are the judgments (or decisions) of God.

The expression “beyond tracing out” translates a single Greek word, which literally means “incapable of being traced by footprints.”³ We see the decisions that God has come to, mapped out in Paul’s letter to the Romans, but we cannot trace God’s thought processes back to their origins. Like footprints in the sand, washed away by the steady wash of the tide, they are beyond our ability to search out.

In order to underline his meaning, Paul quotes from two Old Testament scriptures:

- **Isaiah 40:13-14** – “Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?”
- **Job 41:11** – “Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.”

In the first scripture, we see not only that God has no need to seek human counsel in the laying of his plans, but also that human advice would never have come up with such a glorious plan.

In the second scripture, we see that there was no way mankind could have demanded that God do things the way that he did, extending mercy to all on the basis of the Cross. In the end, we are indebted to God, not he to us.

Combined, these two scriptures reveal that God is the sole Designer of his plan of salvation, acting on his own initiative, neither in response to man’s advice nor out of obligation to him. In the end, God has indeed proven himself sovereign in all things.

The Resounding Climax!

With all the Gospel now clearly in view, Paul ends with a resounding declaration: This great and glorious God is the original source, the directing power and the ultimate goal of all things!

- **From him (the source)** – Everything of life and our salvation and our eternal destiny originates from God. He is the great Giver.
- **Through him (the power)** – He is the One who enables us to live holy lives and be the person he intends us to be.
- **To him (the goal)** – He is the ultimate goal of everything, the direction in which all things must conform (**Ephesians 1:9-10**), the person before whom all knees must bow (**Philippians 2:9-11**).

God is indeed worthy of all our love, praise, worship and adoration. In **Revelation**

7:9-12, we find the ultimate response of God’s creatures, both human and angelic, to his glorious plan of salvation:

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’”

God has designed the Gospel so that all honor and glory return to him! He alone receives the praise! He alone deserves the credit! Paul’s resounding climax to his Gospel can be found echoing right throughout the New Testament. In **Jude 24-25** we find this doxology:

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

¹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

² Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the New Testament*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

³ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

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