

# Romans 11:25-36

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word. Join me in Romans chapter 11. Our text for today is Romans chapter 11, verses 25 through 36, which is to the end of the chapter.

We're doing it. We're making it through chapter 11 today, Lord willing. Something could happen to me in the next 30 to 45 minutes. We have been wading in the deep waters of difficult texts these past weeks.

Today, we're going to finish our consideration of chapter 11, which deserves a warning before we plumb its depths. Last week, I issued the warning. This week, I'm going to read to you a warning from the pulpit of Martin Lloyd-Jones.

He said, and I quote, We must be careful that our proper interest in the content of this chapter does not become carnal excitement.

That is, mental excitement. There is more than one way of being excited. We can be excited intellectually as well as emotionally. I warn those who are keen to find out what is going on to be said on this matter, or that, and particularly, on so shall all Israel be saved.

[1:21] This attitude is quite inappropriate when one comes to study the Scriptures. Let us remind ourselves at the outset of two things which we find in this chapter.

The first is that the Apostle refers in it to a mystery. If, therefore, we think that we have this chapter all sorted out and tabulated, and that there could be no other view worth considering, we are already wrong.

But the second is the way in which the Apostle concludes this chapter. Having written it, he finds in himself a state of mind and heart in which he can think of and do nothing else but praise and worship God.

Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. The consideration of this truth had that effect on him.

So it should on us and on all who consider it. And that is what we now begin to do. End quote. So, let's approach this text together with humility and awe that moves us to praise.

[2:31] Romans 11, beginning in verse 25. Let me remind you before I read it, beloved, that this is God's word to us written for his glory and our good. So we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Let's read it in verse 26. Let's read it in verse 26. Lest you be wise in your own sight. I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers. A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written, the Deliverer will come from Zion. He will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

[3:42] For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Now, before making any comments about the details of this text, and we will not have time to talk about all the details of this text, let us set together in our minds what Paul is doing here.

Remember back at the beginning of chapter 9, Paul is lamenting the unbelief of Israel as he works out the theological implications of divine election.

When we arrive at chapter 11, we must see that the entirety of the chapter is framed by the question found at the beginning of verse 1.

[4:53] There he says, I ask then, has God rejected his people? He's working through this arc, this lament at the beginning of chapter 9, seeing that not all Jews will be saved.

But has God rejected his people? He asks at the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 11. And he emphatically answers it, no. He says, by no means.

Paul then offers himself as a witness to this truth. After all, God had saved him. He says, I myself have been saved. And he goes on in chapter 11 and verse 5, so too, just like in the days of Elijah, so too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

It's about people from Israel chosen by grace. The primary doctrine of the chapter is God's faithfulness to his word and the saving of his people.

The primary exhortation is for Gentile or non-Jewish followers of Christ, and it's found at the beginning of verse 18.

[6:07] There he says, do not be arrogant toward the branches. Right? In the middle of an analogy about branches being cut off so that they, as Gentiles, could be grafted in.

He says, do not become arrogant. So you could walk away from this chapter. And I don't want to suggest for a moment that the entire chapter is not of value to us, but I want you to get, at very least, these two things.

Right? In God's divine elective purpose, he has not rejected the Jewish people, and therefore, those of us who are non-Jewish Christians should not become arrogant towards the unbelief of Israel.

Now, regardless of all the possible ways we can understand this chapter, we need to be careful not to miss those two points. Right? Again, God is faithful to his promises, and we, assuming you're like me, non-Jewish, should still see that God has a saving purpose for Israel.

Paul compounds his exhortation against arrogance in verse 25. Boy, excuse me. I'm still fighting this cold a bit. There he says, lest you be wise in your own sight.

[7:36] I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers. A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

This mystery is that God, in his divine purpose, is employing a gospel-rejecting strategy for the sake of Gentiles, the Jews rejecting the gospel for the sake of the Gentiles, and a jealousy-provoking strategy for the sake of Jews, which we talked about at length last week.

The purpose of God hardening some Jews who were unbelieving was that Gentiles would be saved. God working out his elective purpose through it all.

So Gentile believer, do not become proud. Do not think yourself wise. God is mercifully saving his people.

And this brings us to the challenge of today's text. And I am saying to you, it is a challenge.

[8:45] Some of the language here is difficult. And we see that summarized at the beginning of verse 26 and explained throughout the end of verse 32.

So let's read these verses all together again just to set them in our mind. Verse 26 through 32. And in this way, he's referring back to the fullness of the Gentiles coming in.

It's a direct reference to the phrase previous to that in verse 25. And in this way, all Israel will be saved. As it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion.

He will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be my covenant with them. when I take away their sins. As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake.

But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. They can't be taken away.

[9:46] For just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy.

Right? Gospel rejecting strategy for the sake of Gentiles. Right? Gospel jealousy for the sake of Jews. For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.

Now, up to this point in the chapter, Paul has been making his case in the present tense. Right? Paul is writing. What is going on right now? What is he observing is happening in his day?

And now he turns his writing and our minds eschatologically, that is, toward the end of the age. He is still speaking of God's present work, but he has fixed his gaze on the full realization of God's saving purpose.

Now, we will not have the bandwidth this morning to pull apart each of those phrases. And frankly, you'll ask me and I'll go, yep, that's an interesting turn of phrase there. So, we're going to structure the study of our text this morning by thinking about what could be possibly meant by the phrase, in this way, all Israel will be saved.

[11:10] Right? Particularly that all Israel. What does that mean? And you can find many interpretations of this text.

And this morning I'm just going to cover the four most common. And I'm going to begin with those least probable and move to those most probable.

And I will tell you with a great deal of trembling what I think it means. So, here we go. Number one, least probable to the most probable interpretations.

So, number one, all Israel means every ethnic Jew throughout history will be saved. Right? That's one position.

Right? All Israel means every ethnic Jew throughout history will be saved. And we find some evidence to support this position in verse 12 as an example of chapter 11.

[12:11] If their trespass means riches for the world and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean?

And in today's text, specifically, verse 28 and verse 32, right? As regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

Broad reference to Israel. Verse 32, for God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.

Now, if we take the phrase all Israel in verse 12 and 28 and 32 at face value, then it would be proper to conclude that in God's divine purpose, every ethnic Jew throughout history will be saved.

So how can we know that this is not the proper way to interpret this text? We can know this because if this is what Paul means, then he would have no reason to be grieved by the unbelief of Jewish people.

[13:26] Why would he be concerned at all if he believes that in the end all ethnically Jewish people will be saved? Remember back Romans chapter 9, and I've referenced it a few times, but just hear it beginning in verse 1.

He says, I'm speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Why is this? Because he's been talking about God's elective purpose at the end of chapter 8. In order to found our faith on God's work in our lives, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

No one is his answer. And what he does with that then, he says, but what about those unbelieving Jewish people? He has great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart.

And then verse 3 says, for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh. He's so grieved that he himself would be separated from Christ for their sake, that they would believe the gospel.

[14:38] He would have no reason to feel this way at all, to feel it so strongly, if in just a few short chapters he's going to teach us that all ethnic Jews will be saved.

Additionally, we can see in chapter 11 that not all Jewish people were saved in his day. So he's a witness to this.

Look at the beginning of the chapter, verse 2 through 7. Again, he's answering this question, has God rejected his people? And he says, God has not rejected his people, whom he foreknew. He qualifies it there. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Remember, you may know the story of Elijah.

He had issued this challenge against the prophets of Baal. It's the altars and the altars that burn and the altars that don't burn. This major victory has taken place and yet his life is being sought.

[15:44] All of Israel hasn't turned back the way he had hoped would happen and so he issues this complaint and we see the record of it there in verse 3. Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars and I alone am left and they seek my life.

And then Paul asks, but what is God's reply to him? God says, I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So there's a remnant that is kept faithful.

So too, Paul says, verse 5, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And then he makes the point, but if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

What then, verse 7, Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking, the elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened. So, in Paul's day, not all Jewish people are going to be saved.

In the days of Elijah, not all Jewish people were saved. And I would suggest to you, in our day, not all Jewish people are saved.

[16:59] Further, this view would also have to support the idea that a person can be saved apart from faith in the person and work of Christ, which just isn't the case and rips this chapter from its surrounding context.

If you look back just a chapter, Romans chapter 10, we don't have to go far in Paul's theology. He says, verse 12, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

He's asking rhetorical questions. And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent as it is written? How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. So Paul's already made the case that we will be saved, we call on the name of Christ, but for us to do that we have to know the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[18:16] It has to be preached to us that we might believe in it. Just a few verses later, verse 17, chapter 10, he says, so faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

So, it's one position, all Israel means every ethnic Jew throughout history will be saved, which I think we do well to reject altogether.

Second, probable, little more probable position. All Israel means the church.

This position holds that Paul is not talking about ethnic Israel at this point, but all those who will ever be saved by Christ. Proponents of this view appeal to texts like Romans chapter 2, verse 28 and 29.

There Paul says, for no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the spirit, not by the letter.

[19:25] His praise is not from man, but from God. And Romans chapter 9, verses 6 through 8. But it's not as though the word of God has failed, for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. So he's saying, and he makes the case in other places as well, that there's a spiritual Israel that's saved by God.

And I like this position for its intended tidiness, but I find it very difficult to support it in the immediate context. He sure seems to be talking about ethnically Jewish people, especially as he's talking

about their rejection for the sake of Gentiles, as you read through chapter 11.

I'd love to unlock some kind of, you know, have the key and unlock it and show you that that's what it means. I just think it's really difficult to make that case. Two examples from Romans 11.

Paul there is not only saying that he is an Israelite, but he goes on to talk about ethnically.

[20:52] He's very clear. That's what he's saying. A descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. And then in our text today, verse 25, must you be wise in your own sight.

Don't be unaware of this mystery, brothers. A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. There he's talking about ethnic groups in that case.

So it's very tidy. I really would love for it to be the case, but I also think we can safely and we do well to reject this position. I stated that we move from less probable to more probable interpretations.

To be clear, I find those first two previously stated positions to be impossible and so just wrong.

Now we move on to two positions I find actually probable.

So the third, all Israel means a dramatic future salvation for ethnic Jews.

[22:00] A dramatic future salvation for ethnic Jews. Jews this is a popularly held position. The holders of it have their variations in the specifics, but generally agree that there will be some great inclusion of ethnic Jews into the church before Christ's return.

Most believe that all Jews alive at that time is what Paul means there. This view is held by men like John MacArthur, John Piper, and Jonathan Edwards.

It is not the view that I hold, but I always shudder to disagree with the Johns. So I disagree very loosely and very humbly.

This is an orthodox position to hold of this chapter. This view is careful, it is articulate, the fact that throughout the Old Testament of chapter 11, and the fact that throughout the Old Testament, the remnant preserved within Israel is always a sign of hope for Israel as a whole.

Like I said, you are in good company if you hold this position, and if you want to read and understand more about it, I encourage you to read Tom Schreiner's commentary on these verses.

[23:30] It's a position he holds, he does a very good job of explaining it, and the whole commentary is commendable, it's a good resource for a study of Romans.

I do find that some of the arguments for this view seem to be carried along by mere optimism, and I try not to be a person who's known as pessimistic, I try to be optimistic, optimistic, but I also try not to interpret things by optimism.

I hold the final view I will present to you that all Israel means a remnant of ethnic Jews throughout history, which I do not hold pessimistically, but listen to what Schreiner says concerning this position.

This is to that point, and it seems carried along by optimism. So to my position, he says, the difficulty with the remnant throughout history interpretation is that the mystery revealed is stunningly anticlimactic.

That is, his primary defense against the position that I hold is that it's stunningly anticlimactic. And I just don't find that what does or doesn't make for a good story from our perspective to be a very reliable hermeneutic.

[24:47] But I digress. This is a commonly held view. There's going to be a dramatic future salvation for ethnic Jews.

And hear me very carefully. I am on board with it if this is what Paul means by that. I'm a fan if that is what Paul means. But I don't think it's what he means, and I'm just briefly going to show you why. Number four, fourth position, the one I hold, all Israel means a remnant of ethnic Jews throughout history. Without placing any particular number on what that may mean.

And I hold this position because I find that this position squares what Paul has been teaching about divine election and a Jewish remnant from the beginning of chapter nine.

So I know if you're a guest this morning and you're here sitting in the middle of this, you don't know what I'm talking about. I encourage you to go back and listen. If you've been here, you know this is what we have been talking about from the beginning of chapter nine.

[25:54] I do not find this view to be at all pessimistic or anticlimactic when understood in the light of our severe rebellion and God's

immeasurable grace and mercy.

I think that we have all that Paul has taught from the beginning of this letter in our minds if we find ourselves in the end of chapter one and in chapter two, and in chapter three, as we should, rebels against a good, kind, loving king, having rejected his rule in our lives.

We deserve eternal damnation. We should be very aware of our spiritual unworthiness. If we have our minds there, then we will be absolutely astounded that God saves at all.

That he saves our rebellious souls and that he has and will save the rebellious souls of others, both Jews and Gentiles.

So it's not at all pessimistic to read this and just say, I think Paul's just saying that God's going to save all those Gentiles he intends to save and God's going to save all those Jews that he intends to save because nobody deserves it.

[27:08] If you deserve anything at all, it's a little miniature catechism in our house with our boys. Boys, what do you deserve? When they act like they deserve something, they act entitled, what do you deserve?

And they've been taught to say, death and health. If we have that mind, which is true, it's what I deserve for my rebellion against God.

But when I'm dismissed from that punishment, when I'm let out of the courtroom, right, from death to life, I don't think I'm going to yell things over my shoulder.

But that's not fair. How dare you? I would just leave with gratitude because I know what I deserved and I know what I've been granted, salvation in Christ.

What an incredible thing that God saves at all, that he saves people of all kinds, right, both Jew and Gentile.

[28:05] It's the way we should read this chapter. Now, as I said, you are most welcome to disagree with me. Please come tell me. It won't hurt my feelings.

I'm sure that it hasn't been the first and won't be the last time that you disagree with me. But let us not miss that we have failed to understand this text if we become arrogant toward ethnic Jews, if we stop caring that the gospel we preach to them, and if we are not moved to praise.

Let's spend the rest of our time together on the praise at the end of chapter 11. Beloved, good theology rightly held, it's possible to believe the right thing and to believe it wrongly in the way that you hold it.

Good theology drives doxology. If you're believing things that the Bible teaches rightly, it should lead you to praise.

And that's where Paul goes. I just imagine him bursting into this kind of praise of God. He hasn't written an outline and thought, boy, at the end of chapter 11, I must say something glorious.

[29:16] I'm about to transition to the practical stuff, so I better really have a reason to slip an amen in there. I think he's just moved as he's considering this and thinking about this.

And he says, I'm going to read it for you again, O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. An interjection of strong emotion. That O is there in the original language. He's moved.

It's a guttural thing that he is beginning to do here. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. Immeasurable weight that he's trying to express here.

[30:22] How unsearchable are his judgments. How inscrutable or impossible to understand are his ways. The mystery of how it is that God is saving a people for his glory is what Paul is expressing here.

For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? There's a citation from Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 13. God's thoughts, not our thoughts.

I have often tried to work out some of the tensions that are presented in the Bible. Been frustrated by them, thinking somehow that I ought to be able to do it.

And I've decided rather just to trust what the Bible teaches. perhaps a full understanding of it would split my head open. And God in his infinite wisdom recognizes my finite frailty and just teaches me

what I need to know.

He is sovereign over my salvation. I am responsible for my belief. I know, I know that's attention.

[31:40] It's one I think that we're meant to hold. A couple chapters later in the book of Isaiah chapter 55 verse 8 and 9 God there says, not Paul, God says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. infinitely, heavens higher than the earth.

And so it's okay to not understand everything that's in the Bible. It's okay to ask questions. I encourage the asking of questions, but we need to ask questions rightly.

We need to go to the text humbly, right? Be underneath it, submit ourselves to it, recognize that it's authored by God himself. That he's chosen to reveal himself to us in this way.

In chapter 11, I've joked with some of you that I kind of wish Paul had an editor for chapter 11 and would have condensed it and simplified it for us. I think we're meant to see it as a mystery. I think we're meant to go, man, God's saving purpose is difficult to understand.

[32:52] And then we're meant to be moved to praise in this way. Paul rebukes the kind of questioning that doesn't approach the Bible that way.

who are you, oh man, to answer back to God, he says in chapter 9 and verse 20. It's as if he's saying, who are you to stand in judgment over what God has said?

Will what is molded say to its molder? why have you made me like this? A rhetorical mocking question. We ought not approach God with questions in that manner.

But we can ask the questions and we can go to the text and we can have good conversation about what God has said about himself and his word. Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?

No one. No one. Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? God owes us nothing. He's citing our Job 40 and verse 11.

[33:58] For from him and through him and to him are all things. God is the author, he is the agent, and he is the aim.

Everything exists for his sake. That includes you and I and that is good.

And notice what Paul does right after that. To him be glory, magnification, that God will be known for who he is. To him be glory forever.

Amen. I love from the beginning, verse 8, chapter 8, verse 28, to the end of this chapter. If you're wrestling with any of this, read it from there, chapter 8, verse 28, through the end of chapter 11.

Paul, not fully comprehending everything, is moved to this kind of praise. God, this is a mystery. He trusts the Lord, he defends the Lord, and he's moved to praise in this way.

[35:06] To him be glory forever. Amen. Amen. It's a little bit of application. It's very similar to last week. For those of us who are in Christ, who have already placed saving faith in him, we should be amazed at God's sovereign plan of salvation.

We should just be absolutely astounded by it. We should be amazed that we are any part of it. number two, we should be humble because our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

And this should give us a great confidence before our God. Daniel Caudry, 17th century pastor said, if all the graces of God are precious pearls, then humility is the string that ties them all together.

And thirdly, we should plead God's saving grace for all peoples. If we understand that God has a sovereign plan of salvation for the world, if we're amazed by it as we should be, then we should desire to be a people who are sent, who preach that good news to everyone.

Whether it's your neighbor and co-worker in Dahlonga, your classmate, or God sends you to the very end of the earth. For those this morning who are not in Christ, your rejection of the saving work of Jesus Christ is keeping you from the goodness of God.

[36:51] Repent of your sin and put your faith in him for the salvation of your soul. He lived the life God requires of you and died the death that you deserve. Jesus will grant you his perfection and he took your punishment if you will just believe that his work was effectual for you.

Just turn from your sin and flee to Christ. Let's pray together. for you.