

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 28, chapter 11 conclusion

As we begin with verse 25 of Romans chapter 11, it is quite clear that Paul has a troubling concern on his mind. It is that gentiles may misunderstand, even exaggerate, their place in the Kingdom of God because of their faith in Christ. It has always been so beginning with Abraham that gentiles were invited to worship Israel's God and to place themselves under the covenants that Yehoveh made with Israel. However until the advent of Christ it was assumed by all Hebrews and even the gentiles that a true conversion was needed for a gentile to join Israel.

In ancient times, especially, gods were identified to specific nations. There was usually one god that was considered as the founding god of a nation. The relationship between a particular god and his nation was so intertwined that it was not unusual to call a nation by its national name and alternatively by the name of its god. The nation of Assyria is a good example as it is prominent in the Bible. Assyria's founding god is Asshur. Thus in the Old Testament it is common to refer at times to Assyria as Asshur. So if a person from another nation wishes to worship the god of Assyria, Asshur, then it was assumed that the person would become a national Assyrian. Otherwise their thought process was: 'what could possibly be the point of being part of one nation, but worshipping the founding god of an entirely different nation'? No benefit could come from such a devotion. The people of Israel, of course, viewed such a prospect the same way.

Therefore since Yehoveh was the founding god of Israel it made no sense for a person of another nation (a gentile) to worship the Hebrew God, the God of Israel, as their god. So if for whatever reason a gentile decided to devote himself to Yehoveh, then it was self-evident that this gentile should convert and become an Israelite (in Christ's day, a Jew); both sides believed in this protocol as a given. It is important to understand that this was human thought and human custom that was being observed; it was not God's way. Yet God seemed to permit this misperception to continue among mankind, even among His own people, until the right moment in history arrived when it was time to take His people back to school. That moment was the advent of Messiah Yeshua.

It was Paul whom Yeshua elected as the school master. His job was to teach Jew and gentile that nationality, ethnicity, race, and gender were irrelevant when it came to worshipping the true God and to attaining eternal life. It was especially the case when it came to trusting in the Jewish Messiah whom God sent to deliver humankind from their sins. As it is easy to imagine, gentiles, the outsiders so-to-speak, were more receptive to such a notion of inclusion without conversion than were Jews, the insiders. This set the Jewish Paul against most of his brethren as he fought against requiring gentiles to be circumcised to follow Yeshua since circumcision was the official right-of-passage for a gentile to convert and become a national Jew.

Because as humans it can be hard for us to view most anything through other than the lens of

our own interests and experiences, Paul's defense of gentiles gaining eternal life and forgiveness of sins through Israel's Messiah, but without conversion, was seen as a combination of theological heresy and a kind of national treason by the Jews. Gentiles on the other hand apparently often saw it as God's favor being withdrawn from Israel in order to be placed upon gentiles. What did some gentiles conclude from this? Gentiles must be better than Jews in some ways, otherwise why would the God of the Jews start including gentiles? Paul seemed to believe this attitude of gentiles was not only present in the City of Rome, the intended audience of his letter to the Romans; it also portended bad things for the Body of Christ in general as the influx of gentiles to the faith increased. So throughout the Book of Romans Paul has been building a case to explain to the Jews why the gentiles belong; and to tell the gentiles not to get big-headed about it, hoping that gets him ahead of the curve in what he sees as a looming problem.

Open you Bibles to Romans 11. We're going to read from verse 25 to the end.

### RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 11:25 - end

I have digressed from time to time to describe how the early Church Fathers perceived what Paul was trying to explain in his letters, and how it is to be taken especially by **gentile** Christians. Little could be more important to the fundamental doctrines that drive Christianity today than what the early Church Fathers decided. But as I have shown you in previous lessons, they shared no universal viewpoint on much of anything especially through perhaps the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, what we do find is a trend from the earliest of the Church Fathers (a little before 100 A.D.) to the later ones (up to the late 700's A.D.), to embrace the very thing Paul warned against here in Roman 11. That is, the Church Fathers eventually saw faith in Yeshua as not only an exclusively gentile faith, but also something that Jews were unworthy of participating in. Even in the earlier times there was a disagreement among the Church Fathers of just who ought to be granted membership into Christianity, and much at that was based on the place of the Law of Moses in the life of a Believer. Naturally, the more gentile in nature that a Church Father saw the Church, the more he pushed against the Law of Moses. A good example would be that of Gennadius of Constantinople. He lived in the mid-400's A.D. In his entry into the Pauline Commentary of the Greek Church, he said this:

***“The apostle (Paul) expressed himself in this way....because he wants to show that the law and grace are completely incompatible and that the two of them can never go together. Of necessity, one must drive the other out.”***

So here we have essentially a declaration of war from the Church Father Gennadius setting Christianity against the Law of Moses, and thus having the effect of setting gentiles against Jews. Another and different Church Father, Augustine, who lived just a couple of decades before Gennadius, had an entirely different viewpoint. In his homily called The Spirit and the Letter, Augustine said this:

***“Grace is given not because we have done good works but in order that we may have the power to do them; not because we have fulfilled The Law but in order that we may be able to fulfill it”.*** So Augustine agrees with Paul and with Christ that the purpose of

salvation through grace is so that we can be properly devoted to God's commandments and, by means of the Holy Spirit, enabled to do them in the spirit that God intended. Clearly this was an inviting message to the Jewish people and not one that pitted gentile against Jew or elevated gentile above Jew by dismissing the Law of Moses as an enemy of Christianity.

Therefore it is with a breath of fresh air that we read of yet another Church Father, Pelagius, who although championing some doctrines that we today would find most heretical, nonetheless says in his Commentary on the Book of Romans specifically regarding Romans 11:25:

***“All that follows is designed to prevent the gentiles from being filled with pride towards the Jews. It is a secret unknown to mankind why the gentiles were saved, because Israel’s blindness in fact furnished the occasion for their salvation. The blindness continued until the Jews saw that the gentiles were being saved, since all were called to salvation”.***

So what we find is that by the early 400's A.D. there was a growing schism within the Church as to the place of The Law of Moses and to the place of Jews. It is rather ironic that in his era Paul seeks to, somehow, try to fit gentiles into their proper role within this religion of the Jews that believes upon Yeshua of Nazareth as their Messiah; but within 3 more centuries the Church had many leaders who were not sure if it was possible, or even desirable, to fit Jews into Christianity. Within a few more centuries after that, the predominant view of the Church leadership was that Jews not only had no place within the Body of Christ as worshippers of Yeshua, but also that they really had no place on this earth living in the same locations where Christians might reside.

Though Paul was not a prophet in the same sense as Isaiah or Elijah or John, he indeed saw the future truly based on what he saw starting to happen in his day.

By beginning verse 25 employing the word “for”, the idea is that Paul is going to give his readers the reason for his olive-tree analogy. Here, when he uses the term brothers (notice: brothers, not brethren), brothers is meant to indicate fellow Believers: Jews and gentiles. The CJB uses a dynamic translation of this verse because it revolves around the Greek word ***musterion*** that is usually translated into English as mystery. As Dr. David Stern, the creator of the CJB, explains it, he does this because the English word mystery as used in modern times means something different than what the Greek word ***musterion*** meant to impart 2000 years ago. It does not mean mystery in the sense of a riddle, nor does it mean mystery in the pagan religious sense that is expressed in the term Mystery Babylon Religions. Rather, says Dr. Stern, it means it more as a truth that God holds intimately secret unto Himself, which at the proper moment He will reveal it. The Lord has chosen Paul to be the messenger of this secret truth and it is this: by all human logic, and from a human fairness standpoint, one would reckon that the entire nation of the Jews would be the first ones to be saved because of Christ. After all, they were given God's Word, they produced both Mediators that God would ever give us (Moses and then Yeshua), and the Jews were the first to hear the Gospel and given the Holy Spirit, and it was especially aimed at them.

**Romans 1:16 CJB <sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.***

Still aiming his words mostly at gentile Believers, Paul explains why God is revealing this **musterion** (this truth that had been concealed but is now revealed) at this time and it is "So that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do". That is, so that gentiles don't misunderstand God's purpose and motive for including them in His salvation plan at this time, Paul will explain the situation. And what is the reason for including gentiles?

**Romans 11:25-26 CJB <sup>25</sup> *For, brothers, I want you to understand this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed, so that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do. It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness;* <sup>26</sup> *and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved.....***

Paul reveals the three elements that make up this amazing truth that has remained hidden for thousands of years. First, it is that part of Israel has become hardened. The words that stoniness "has come upon" Israel puts the onus on God, and not the people, as the source of the hardening. On the other hand, God hardened those particular Israelites (Jews) because they freely chose not to accept Yeshua as their Messiah. The stone-like hardness of mind against Yeshua is, however, not total. Since the moment Christ revealed Himself there have always been Jews who believed. So the hardening is a divine hardening, and not all of Israel has been affected by it, but the largest part has. Yet there is a remnant that was not hardened, and that remnant is the many thousands of Jewish Believers in Yeshua.

The second element is that this hardening will remain in place UNTIL the gentile world enters its fullness. The Greek word that is being translated as fullness is **pleroma** and it usually indicates the wholeness, the completeness, of something. It comes from the exact same root as the Greek word **pleroo** (**pleroo**, **pleroma**). Why is that important? Because it is also one of the key words of Matthew 5:17 – 19 when Christ says: <sup>17</sup> **"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.** The English word complete is the Greek **pleroo**, which means to fill to the fullest or to bring something to its full wholeness. Can you now see how this relates? Christ came to bring the Law to a complete wholeness in the same way that God intends on bringing gentiles to a complete wholeness (obviously to complete does not mean to terminate unless God's goal is to terminate gentiles as well as the Law). But what exactly does "entering their fullness" mean as it concerns gentiles? It means that when God determines that the gentile world has been evangelized fully enough, and gentile humans have been given sufficient opportunity to make a decision for or against Christ, then the gentiles have entered their fullness; there are no more that will be saved, at least under the current circumstances. It is upon that determination that God will begin to supernaturally remove the stoniness of heart that non-Believing Jews have.

The third element is that the purpose of elements one and two are to bring about the third element, which is to save all Israel. This path to a saving righteousness for all Israel that seems so convoluted (it begins with Jews, then includes gentiles, then goes back to the Jews)

is in fact the path that God has determined. But what does “all Israel” mean? Does it mean every last Israelite? I think it has a meaning on two levels. The first level is that throughout the Bible “all Israel” is synonymous with “the whole house of Israel”. And “the whole house of Israel” is referring to the fact that Israel has always been a divided family. Historically it is represented by two socio/political factions: a group of tribes led by Judah, and a second group of tribes led by Ephraim. The Bible refers to these two groups of tribes as the two Houses of Israel: the House of Judah and the House of Ephraim. The House of Judah is what we know today as “the Jews”. The House of Ephraim is better known as “The 10 Lost Tribes”. What Paul is revealing is the “how” of what Ezekiel reveals in his famous prophecy of the two sticks in Ezekiel 37. We won’t read the entire chapter, but here is the final part of it so that we can see the relationship between this mystery that Paul is revealing and the mystery that Ezekiel is revealing hundreds of years earlier.

### **Ezekiel 37:15-28 CJB**

**<sup>15</sup> The word of ADONAI came to me:**

**<sup>16</sup> "You, human being, take one stick and write on it, 'For Y'hudah and those joined with him [among] the people of Isra'el.' Next, take another stick and write on it, 'For Yosef, the stick of Efrayim, and all the house of Isra'el who are joined with him.' <sup>17</sup> Finally, bring them together into a single stick, so that they become one in your hand. <sup>18</sup> When your people ask you what all this means, <sup>19</sup> tell them that Adonai ELOHIM says this: 'I will take the stick of Yosef, which is in the hand of Efrayim, together with the tribes of Isra'el who are joined with him, and put them together with the stick of Y'hudah and make them a single stick, so that they become one in my hand.'**

**<sup>20</sup> The sticks on which you write are to be in your hand as they watch.**

**<sup>21</sup> Then say to them that Adonai ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land. <sup>22</sup> I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup> "They will never again defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all the places where they have been living and sinning; and I will cleanse them, so that they will be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>24</sup> My servant David will be king over them, and all of them will have one shepherd; they will live by my rulings and keep and observe my regulations.**

**<sup>25</sup> They will live in the land I gave to Ya'akov my servant, where your ancestors lived; they will live there- they, their children, and their grandchildren, forever; and David my servant will be their leader forever. <sup>26</sup> I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give to them, increase their numbers, and set my sanctuary among them forever. <sup>27</sup> My home will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>28</sup> The nations will know that I am ADONAI, who sets Isra'el apart as holy, when my sanctuary is with them forever.'"**

So my point is that since Paul is applying what he says to “all Israel”, then “all Israel” has to mean, at the least, both houses of Israel. But that can’t happen until the two houses are rejoined. And that happens either after or coincidentally with, the time when the fullness of the gentiles has been reached. We read in Ezekiel 37 about the reuniting of the two houses, and the end of their ungodliness, and of their being ruled by “David” FOREVER. David is referring to the Messiah from the family of David (David had been dead for 300 years by the time of Jeremiah, so obviously he meant the royal descendants of David; not David himself). And no mortal king rules forever; but Yeshua will. So it is clear who Ezekiel is referring to as the “forever” ruler of an undivided Israel.

As it so happens the two houses of Israel are in process of reuniting as we speak. Thousands of members of the “10 Lost Tribes” are returning and reuniting with their brother tribe Judah (the Jews) in the Holy Land and I have personally witnessed it. Most mission organizations will confess that for all practical purpose our entire planet has had the Word of God sent out to it. Not 100%, but I don’t think that is the actual requirement that every last living gentile will personally hear the Gospel before the prophesied “fullness of the gentiles” has been reached. The Bible simply doesn’t deal by such standards.

But I spoke of “all Israel” as also having a meaning on a second level. For sure it means what I just explained to you. But what it also likely means is similar to what “fullness of the gentiles” means. That is, all Israel means that the full number of Jews (Hebrews, actually) who will ever believe has been attained (according to God’s calculation). But the bottom line is this: all Israel will NOT be saved until God determines that the fullness of the gentiles has occurred.

As the proof text for what he is asserting, in verses 26 & 27 Paul combines two passages from the Book of Isaiah: Isaiah 59:20, 21 and Isaiah 27:9. For the sake of time we won’t go to these passages in Isaiah and read the full context; however the gist of it is that these are dealing with the End of Days. So the idea is that God is intervening in Israel’s affairs at the End of Days and is Himself taking away sin from Jacob (from Israel). Paul is saying that these Scriptures are speaking of that time when the divine hardening of Israel comes to an end as Israel accepts their Redeemer, their Messiah; but this only happens as the End of Days has begun.

Verse 28 continues with the theme that is being directed towards gentile Believers. Paul says that as regards the Gospel, the ONLY reason that God has acted as He has towards Israel (hardening them) is for the sake of the gentiles. But at the same time Israel remains loved by God for the sake of the Hebrew Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). So Israel hasn’t necessarily merited the hardening any more than they have merited the love. Thus gentiles shouldn’t look at the Jews and think that their hardening is a divine punishment, anymore than their election and the love God gives them is a reward. Israel is a tool for redemption; a tool that can be used by the Divine Craftsman a number of different ways to achieve His purpose.

Then we hit another of those verses that makes me slap my forehead and wonder how in the world so many can get it so wrong when the words are so clear and precise? Paul says that God’s gifts and his calling are irrevocable. Some abduct this phrase and use it to back the case for a once-saved-always-saved doctrine. But this verse has nothing to do with Christians at all; the subject is Israel (they were hated for the gentiles’ sake and loved for the Patriarch’s

sake). So the permanence of Israel's calling as God's chosen people is the context. However, as many of you are probably aware, a goodly portion of the Church has determined that in the New Testament, wherever we find the word "Israel" as regards redemption and election, we should just strike it out and replace it with the word "Church". Yet Paul says that such a calling of Israel cannot be revoked, canceled, or as some Christians think, be re-assigned to somebody else. Israel is, and will always be, God's elect. Their unfaithfulness and their sinning do not affect that position even though by human standards and reasoning we might think it should. But what does Paul mean by it is for the Patriarch's sake that God continues to love Israel? What is the Patriarch's sake? They were the receivers of God's precious promises; and those promises are contained in a covenant: the Abrahamic Covenant. So what is really being said is that Israel is loved by God, without any chance of revocation, for the sake of the Covenant He made with the Patriarchs. It is the covenant relationship with Israel that is not cancelable for any reason.

In verse 30 Paul makes a comparison between Israel and gentiles. The purpose is to make clear the equality in God's eyes between Jews and gentiles, and to highlight once again that gentiles should understand that it is nothing that they did that has caused God to offer them salvation; rather it was because of His great mercy. But even more, gentiles were disobedient. Paul spent the first few chapters of Romans speaking of gentiles in terms of Natural Law; and that humans have written within our inner parts certain premises for behavior and morality...all humans possess this. Thus the fact that gentiles didn't have the Law of Moses to go by doesn't change anything. Breaking the Natural Law is no different as pertains to sin than breaking the Law of Moses; it is still disobedience. The result of this disobedience is the same, then, for those who have the Natural Law (gentiles) as for those who have the Law of Moses (the Jews): the eternal death sentence. Therefore gentiles are in equal need for God's mercy as are the Jews.

And yet, Paul cautions, the mercy that gentiles have received was ONLY because of Israel's disobedience and God's reaction to it. Therefore, says Paul, it is the duty of gentiles to show the disobedient Jews mercy, because by showing Jews the same mercy that God showed to the gentiles then the Jews can also receive God's mercy. And what is God's mercy? Salvation through trust in Yeshua! I'll bet you have never thought about your salvation in those terms, have you? Let's break this down. The disobedient Jews were hardened by God. This enabled God to turn to gentiles and offer them the mercy, the salvation that Israel, as a whole, turned down. But now gentiles, understanding that our job is to make Israel jealous for the same salvation that we have through their Messiah, is to accomplish this by showing such Godly love to them that they can't resist. And by Believing gentiles showing the Jewish people such tender love and mercy, it will make them open to accepting the saving mercy through Yeshua that saved us. This reaction of Jews to Believing gentiles is guaranteed. But shoving a Christian tract into a Jew's hands on a street corner; or laying an English New Testament on the front porch of an Ultra-Orthodox Jew is not showing them God's mercy; all that does is offend. So what does show love and mercy to the Jewish people? What is the actual application of this duty of gentile Believers to show love and mercy to Jews?

By way of example I suppose this makes me want to boast a little bit about Seed of Abraham Ministries because while we teach this and other Godly principles, we also obey God's

command to show love and mercy to the Jewish people. We have a non-profit retail store that imports goods made by industrious Jews in Israel, and we sell those goods in America, and online, to help Jewish families make a living. We have a humanitarian ministry in Jerusalem, run entirely by Messianic Jews, that helps Israelis in need, provides scholarships to college and vocational schools for Israeli youth, and helps the young soldiers of the IDF with clothing and other items that the army can't provide them. We also operate a sizeable youth ministry there to mentor the young Believing Jewish adults in their walk with Yeshua. We have another and different ministry in the Mediterranean port city of Ashdod. It is a teaching ministry that teaches the Holy Scriptures, including the New Testament, in the Hebrew language to the local Jews. Then we disciple those who have shown an interest in Yeshua. We, of course, aren't the only ones taking literally God's command to show mercy to Jews in response to the saving righteousness that we have received from God on account of them. But folks, the Father is not offering us **a suggestion** to show mercy to His people. I've often said that, sadly enough, the evangelical Church has made salvation itself the goal of being a Christian. Thus once saved we can retire, secure that we'll go to Heaven when we die. Yet the Lord makes it clear that we are saved for a purpose larger than ourselves. And one of our great purposes is to help save all Israel. That isn't our only purpose, but it is the purpose that Yehoveh says is at the top of His list.

Verse 32 essentially summarizes the focal point of Romans chapters 9 through 11. The twin themes of disobedience by all humans, and God's mercy to all humans, dominates all of Romans. Paul discussed this issue in regards to gentiles quite explicitly back in Romans 1:18 through Romans 2:16. He then discussed it in regards to Jewish people in 2:17 through 3:20, and then took it up again in chapters 5 and 7. What Paul wants all people to understand is that God does NOT cause people to disobey. People disobey because we want to. We don't usually do it out of ignorance, and we don't sin because we don't want to; we sin because we enjoy it. We sin usually because in our selfishness we find it pleasurable and beneficial to us. But when we do sin we find ourselves imprisoned by God, having our advantages and benefits divinely limited, and then we are subjected to consequences because God is just and disobedience towards Him cannot go unpunished. This is the condition all humanity faces; not just Jews or not just gentiles. Thus in God's infinite wisdom, because all humanity sins and falls short of the glory of God, all humanity is imprisoned (shut up) in our disobedience. But then God uses this common condition among all humans to make equally available to all humans His great mercy, through His Son Yeshua. Perhaps you can think of a better way that you might have approached the problem of sin and eternal death if you were God. Literally billions of humans think they can. It doesn't matter: this is God's way, and it is the only way that will ever be offered to us.

It is tragic that scoffers and mockers look at this way of the Lord and laugh. They see Yeshua's followers as little more than children following a fantasy. They read about God's plan of redemption and think how silly and impractical it is. But Paul virtually breaks into song as he thinks about the **musterion**, the hidden but now revealed truth that the Lord showed him; about how God saves people from eternal annihilation. <sup>33</sup> ***O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments! How unsearchable are his ways!***



But this not the usual response from humans. Back in Romans chapter 1, Paul said:

**Romans 1:20-22 CJB <sup>20</sup> For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; <sup>21</sup> because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!**

In verses 33 and 34, using passages from Isaiah 40 and from Job 41, Paul continues to extol the virtues and character of our God from His supreme sovereignty, to his unceasing faithfulness, to the fact that not one thing that He promises will ever go undone. Should we not be as overwhelmed as is the Apostle Paul?

So rightfully so, Paul ends this section with a blessing that is also a prayer of thanksgiving for God's great love and mercy towards mankind:

**Romans 11:36 CJB<sup>3</sup> <sup>6</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.**

We'll begin Romans chapter 12 next time.