**GOD’S MERCY AND SALVATION PLAN FOR ISRAEL**

**(Romans 11:1–36)**

***“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.” (vs. 30-31)***

God had made very great and specific promises to Israel. The Old Testament is literally filled with those promises. There is the Abrahamic covenant in which God promises to bless the people that come out of the loins of Abraham.  In Jeremiah 31, God promises to them a new covenant in which He will plant His law within their hearts and redeem them. The greatest promise of all would be the coming of the Christ. God promised David to give a King from his seed who will be a greater King than any king who ever reigned, the Christ. But ironically, the people of Israel rejected the promised Messiah and crucified him. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. The Israelites, however, could not obtain the righteousness they eagerly sought because they refused to believe the good news about Christ. On the other hand, the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained a righteousness that is by faith. By the time Paul was writing this epistle to Rome, numerous gentile churches had already been built. It seemed that Israel had nothing to do with God and his blessing, but the Gentiles did. Rather, the Israelites persecuted the church of Christ. Then questions arose. Did God reject his people? Did Israel stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? As Paul answers these questions, he deeply recognizes God’s grace, mercy, faithfulness, sovereignty, and unfathomable wisdom. May the Holy Spirit teach us the deep things of God!

1. **The Remnant of Israel chosen by grace (vs. 1-10)**

From a human point of view, the Israelites deserved to be rejected. In their self-righteousness and pride they had crucified the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It was a great sin against God. So, did God reject his people? What is Paul’s answer? Look at verse 1a. “I ask then: Did God reject (cast away, push away) his people? By no means!” Paul points to himself and to the people of Elijah’s time as proof of God’s faithfulness. Paul was a true Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject Paul, a Jew, but called him to be an apostle for the Gentiles. He was living proof that God did not reject his people. Also, the seven thousand God spared in the time of Elijah were a testimony to the world that God did not abandon his people. So, Paul says in verse 5, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace”. God did not reject his people, but continues to choose his remnant. Through these remnants, God continues his plan with Israel and keeps his promises and covenants.

Now, we know the fact that God did not reject his people through two proofs, Paul and the remnant of the seven thousand. Why did God, then, not reject his people when they deserved to be rejected? How could we have confidence that God wouldn’t change his mind and cast away a disobedient and obstinate people?

Firstly, it is because of God’s eternal love. Let’s read verse 2. “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.” What does it mean, “foreknew”? Basically, it means a predetermination to love. Usually we think of foreknowledge as simply knowing something before it happens.  That’s not the idea of this term.  It means to determine it.  It’s a guaranteeing word. In the Old Testament, the Bible tells us that a man knew his wife and she had a child.  It’s the knowing of intimacy, it’s the knowing of a close relationship, it’s the knowing of love. That is the essence of it.  It is a predetermined love relationship. God loved his people even before creation. God loved his people in eternity. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So God has not pushed away or rejected His own called people, whom He predetermined to love.

Secondly, it is because God is graceful.  As light shines more bright and beautiful in the midst of darkness, the grace of God is more bright and beautiful in the midst of men’s darkness of sins. Paul once virtually married Judaism and became an enemy of God and a persecutor of the church. He approved of the death of Stephen, and wanted to arrest Christians even in Damascus. Paul said in 1 Tim 1:15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst”. When God was gracious to the worst of sinners like him, Paul was confident that God is still gracious to his people. The time of Elijah was one of the darkest times in Israel’s history. Israel was totally misled under the evil king Ahab and his queen Jezebel. Baal, the god of mammon and sex, was worshiped; God's servants were systematically terminated. When Jezebel sought Elijah’s life, Elijah cried out to God, “…I have had enough, Lord…Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors... I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (1 Ki 19:4, 10) Elijah was fearful of the evil queen, and tired of the nation’s indulgence in idol worship. He was about to give up on his life and on his own nation, when God came to him in a gentle whisper, “…What are you doing here, Elijah?... Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”. (1Ki 19:14-18) Paul saw the grace of God that was shining in the middle of darkest hours of Israel. So, he could shout, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (5).

We pray for North America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But sometimes we are discouraged by the trend of godlessness. Sometimes we feel lonely, like Elijah. Still, God is working mightily in America through his remnant people. Moreover, each of us must see that we are God’s remnant people in our time. Sometimes we see only our own sins and problems. Then we can become depressed and useless. However, by God’s grace, we are God’s remnant people in this generation. I believe I am God’s remnant in this generation. You also are God’s remnant in this generation. God’s remnant is chosen and preserved by God’s grace. By his eternal love and God’s grace alone, God preserves young American people for himself. They are on our campuses right now. They will accept our invitation to Bible study. They will grow spiritually and bear fruit for God. Let’s repent of our sense of failure and narrow vision. Let’s ask God to help us see the remnant of God in our times.

To the Israelites, the blessing of being a chosen people became a snare and a trap. When the Messiah for whom they had waited finally came, they rejected and crucified him. Their hope became a stumbling block and a retribution for them. They were scattered throughout the world and suffered until their backs were bent. To this day, their eyes are darkened so they cannot see Jesus as their Messiah. (7-10). However, even the fall of Israel is part of God’s bigger plan and is under his sovereignty; it won’t last forever.

1. **Ingrafted branches (vs. 11-24)**

Look at verse 11. “Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?” His answer is again “Not at all!” When Israel rejected the Messiah, God channeled his blessing to the Gentiles. Many Gentiles came to Jesus by faith and enjoyed the riches of God’s blessing. In effect, Israel’s rejection has done the whole world a service. When the Jews saw the Gentiles enjoying the riches of God’s blessing, they were envious. This was what God had foretold through Moses: “I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding” (Dt 32:21b). Look at verses 13-14. “I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” Being aware of God’s sovereign wisdom, Paul worked hard to evangelize the Gentile world and arouse Jews to jealousy. Paul was once a narrow-minded Pharisee. But he grew up in Christ to be a man with God’s own heart. He was a shepherd for all the peoples of the world as well as his own people Israel.

Paul was convinced of Israel’s future. He foresaw the glory of his people’s restoration (15). His conviction did not come from wishful thinking; it was based on God’s promise and his faithfulness. God made a covenant with the patriarchs that he would be the God of their descendants. The patriarchs believed in God’s promise and dedicated their lives to God. They were made holy through their faith and love for God. They acted as the consecrated portion and the root of Israel. Look at verse 16. “If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.” In verses 17-24, Paul compares the church of God to an olive tree. The majority of the Israelites were broken off from the olive tree, and the Gentiles, like a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in to share the nourishing sap from the root. Here the root refers to God’s covenant with the patriarchs, which is Jesus Christ (Isa 11:1). The wild olive shoot bears small and tasteless fruit, so people use it only for firewood. By nature, we bore the shameful fruit of sin and were under God’s wrath. By God’s mercy, however, we were grafted into Jesus Christ and now bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So what should our attitude toward salvation be? Look at verses 20b-21. “Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.” God extends his mercy to sinners, but he never compromises with arrogance and unbelief. God will graft the Israelites in if they do not persist in unbelief. On the other hand, he will cut off the Gentiles if they are boastful and unbelieving. Therefore the first and the last thing we must do is remember God’s grace. We should be like the Syrophoenician woman who was willing to take the leftover crumbs of blessing after the Israelite children were fully satisfied (Mk 7:28), and like the Centurion who acknowledged his unworthiness to have Jesus come under his roof, but believed the power of Jesus’ words absolutely. We should be humble but have pure faith so that we also may arouse the jealousy of the Israelites. We must know how much God loves Israel. Puritans, such as Jonathan Edwards, prayed for Israel to accept Jesus as Lord and be saved. They believed that this would bring great blessing on the whole world. When we remember God’s grace, we cannot be proud and live a selfish and pleasure-seeking life chasing after the world. With thankful and joyful hearts, we can dedicate our lives to God’s world redemptive work as channels of God’s blessing to the whole world including Israel.

1. **All Israel will be saved (25-36)**

Look at verses 25-26a. “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved”. Paul calls God’s future plan for Israel “a mystery” – a truth previously unknown, which is now revealed and publicly proclaimed. The apostle Paul used the word mystery 21 times in his Epistles. In each case, the “mystery” involved a wonderful declaration of spiritual truth, revealed by God through divine inspiration. The mystery of God is the consummation of God’s plan in bringing His kingdom in Christ to fulfillment, and the restoration of Israel is the last part of this mystery. As part of God’s mystery, Israel has experienced a hardening of heart, a hardening which is partial (because there is a remnant chosen by grace), temporary (because it will end when the full number of the Gentiles has come in), and purposeful (because the Gentiles could then be ingrafted to Christ). Then, comes the fulfillment of God’s plan for Israel. What is God’s future plan for Israel? Let’s read verses 26b-17. “As it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’” Through the prophets, God promised the future restoration of Israel (Jer 31; Ez 40-48; Zec 12-13). The great conversion of the Jews will occur just before the Second Coming of our Lord. The Lord will come to Jerusalem, the Mount of Zion, and establish his millennial kingdom with his saints including the redeemed Jews (Zec 14:4; Ac 11:1; Rev 1:7). When Israel recovers from her fall and enters into her fullness, the world will experience the riches of God’s grace as never before because Jesus Christ will reign with righteousness and justice, and peace will be ushered in. How can we have confidence that this mystery will be fulfilled? Look at verses 28-29. “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable”. God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable, which means no regrets. God does not regret that he predetermined to love and bless his people, and despite her unfaithfulness and rebellion, God will redeem her. What a blessing we received that we also have become God’s beloved children. God never regrets loving, and saving you. Praise God!

Verses 30-32 teach us that it is only by the mercy of God that Jews and Gentiles alike were saved. It is God’s compassion that brought all of us to God’s family. Knowing this, Paul bursts out with praise in verses 33-36. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?’ For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (33-36). Paul began chapter 9 with great anguish and sorrow, but finished this chapter with praise for God as he was deeply moved by God’s sovereign way of working for his world redemptive purpose. We also cannot help but praise God for his sovereignty, love, faithfulness, grace, and mercy. We were once disobedient and obstinate, but we are saved by God’s grace. Let’s remember that there are God’s remnants who may seem disobedient and rebellious like us. Let’s see them with God’s compassion and love, and continually pray for them.