

Romans Summary
Week 20, Wednesday February 22, 2017
Romans 11:25-36

At the end of the last section Paul made a claim which goes directly contrary to nature; if Israel does not remain in unbelief, as the natural branches, although dead, she can be re-grafted into her own tree. Paul now goes on to explain how this partial hardening functions in God's overarching plan of salvation, that is how it too reveals God's righteousness — the theme of the letter.

Within the plan of God, this hardening of Israel (not God's hardening of Israel, but Israel being hard against God's overtures to redemption) fulfills the purpose of the fullness of the Gentiles coming into God's family. This doesn't speak to a predetermined number of Gentiles who are to be saved or all Gentiles, but whatever amount of Gentiles which come to faith in Jesus throughout time and place.

Paul then says, "in this way all Israel will be saved." These words do not throw out everything Paul has said in this letter so far or what he says in his corpus of writing as a whole. This is not describing a special or second track of salvation for Israel according to the flesh. Nor is it a promise that through special means all Israel according to the flesh will come to faith in Jesus. No. This is in line with what Paul has argued so far. There are Jews and there are Jews. There is Israel and there is Israel. There are children of Abraham and there are children of the promise. When Paul says "in this way," or "by this means," all Israel will be saved he is speaking in line with this redefinition of Israel which is now Jew plus Gentile who have faith in the Messiah. The means of this happening is hardening of Israel and the resulting jealousy which comes from Gentiles sharing the blessings — in this way Israel will be saved.

Like Torah and the 'I' from earlier in the letter this is not a theology of God rejecting his people. No just as the Torah is God's word; holy, righteous and good and the 'I' recognizes God's good judgment, so Israel according to the flesh also has a dual story. They have become a kind of enemy, in so far as they have rejected the gospel and therefore God. But, that animosity benefits the Gentiles so should be honoured. Moreover, they are also children of Abraham so are beloved by God, so they should be honoured.

This assurance that the promises are irrevocable, again, does not guarantee every Jewish person eternal salvation. Rather, it is the promise that ethnic Jewish people will always make up a portion of the saved people of God. Paul keeps breaking down the logic; just as through their disobedience the Gentiles discovered mercy, now because of that mercy they also may be shown mercy — this is the theme of jealousy once more. Paul concludes with a summary statement that God has shut up everyone in disobedience for the purpose of showing mercy to all — there is still no favouritism with God. Again, against any theology that there is.

Paul completes this part of the argument, chapters 9-11 and the argument as a whole 1-11 with praise of God. This wonderful arc of salvation which he has described is the mystery which God has revealed through Paul's gospel. Paul sees it and declares it good! God does not owe this to anyone. Finally, to God is glory — they very thing humanity, in the beginning of the letter failed to give to God, Paul now ascribes it.

“God to the Rescue” reflection and discussion questions:

1. Do you have a better understanding of these words: redemption, salvation, justification, as a result of participating in courses here?
2. Why must real leaders have capacity for repentance?
3. Why is the verse about human disobedience and God's mercy the emotional heart of the letter?