

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 11:1-36.

Romans 9 taught that it never was God's purpose to save every individual in the nation of Israel. It has always been God's purpose to save all those whom he chose and called. Romans 10 explained why Israel as a nation failed. They tried to be saved by their works of the law, instead of by faith in their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Romans 11 teaches that God's purpose with Israel and the Gentile nations will certainly be fully accomplished. The fullness of Israel as well as the fullness of the Gentiles will certainly be saved!

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans chapter 11 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans chapter 11 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 11:1-36. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in **Romans 11:1-24. The interaction between the nation of Israel and the Gentiles with respect to salvation.**

First. Romans 11:1-10 describes the present picture of the nation of Israel. The present picture of Israel is that it is disobedient and stubborn. This led some Gentiles during the New Testament period to conclude that Israel had been rejected and that the Gentiles had taken the place of Israel. However, Paul teaches in verse 1-4 that God has never rejected his own people, Israel. A prove of this is that in the past history of Israel, God always reserved *a remnant* of people for himself who did not bow down to idols and in the present history of Israel, in Paul's time, God also chose a remnant by grace to be his people. The apostle Paul himself was also a Jew. However, it is also true that throughout the history of the nation of Israel, Jews had hardened themselves against God and his message and consequently God hardened them. Jews had hardened themselves in the days of Moses (Dt 29:2-4), in the days of Isaiah (Isa 6:9-10) and in the days of Paul, when they rejected Jesus Christ and his righteousness (11:8b). As a punishment for their continual unbelief and disobedience God hardened them (cf. Rom 9:18).

Second. Romans 11:11-15 describes the present interaction between the nation of Israel and the Gentiles. Verse 11 says, "The stumbling of the nation of Israel was not a fall beyond recovery." This does not mean that Israel only fell *temporally* and afterwards in the future would recover again. It rather means that Israel fell *partially* and not totally. The preceding context dealt with the election of the remnant and the hardening of the remainder of the people of Israel, thus with *a partial rejection* and *not with a temporary rejection*. And the following context deals with the grafting in of believing Jews into the olive root, and thus also with *the partial acceptance* and *not total rejection* of the people of Israel. The fall of Israel was *not temporary, but partial* and their partial fall was not the final and irrevocable doom of Israel.

Verse 12 and 15 contrast Israel's defeat and rejection with its acceptance and fullness. Again the preceding and following contexts show that Paul is not speaking of *just one future end-time event*, but rather of *events that take place in the present, from Paul's time right up to the end-time* when the full number of saved people from both the Gentile nations and the nation of Israel will have been reached. Paul makes much of his ministry in order to provoke Jews to envy and to save some of them (13; 1 Cor 9:19-22). The Bible says that throughout history, wherever Jews do not persist in their unbelief, they are being saved (23). In verse 30-31, Paul summarises and says that Jews are *now* receiving God's mercy as a result of God's mercy shown to the Gentiles. *The marvellous plan of God is that Gentiles are not saved without Jews and that Jews are not saved without Gentiles.* The partial disobedience of Jews has again and again led to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles, as Acts 13:44-48, 18:6 and 28:23-28 show. But in God's marvellous providence, the salvation of Gentiles in the past and present have again and again provoked Jews to envy so that they were saved and the salvation of Gentiles in the future will continue to provoke Jews to envy so that they may also be saved (31). Verse 12 describes the progressive salvation of more and more Jews as "riches for the Gentile world", that is, the conversion of Jews will cause even greater numbers of Gentiles to be saved. Verse 15 says that the *rejection* of Jews during the beginning of the New Testament period led to the reconciliation of many Gentiles to God. The *acceptance* of Jews into the Christian faith is nothing less than "life from the dead", a spiritual resurrection for Jews

(Lk 15:32; Eph 2:1-10)! God will use the conversion of Jewish and Gentile Christians to interact on each other until the full number of believers from both the Jews (12) and the Gentiles (25) are reached.

Third. Romans 11:16-24 describes the ability of the sovereign God to fulfil his plan of salvation. In these verses, Paul directs his argument especially against the Gentile Christians, so that they will not misunderstand God's salvation plan concerning Israel. God has made his covenant with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that "he would be their God" and "they and their descendants would be his people forever". The partial hardening of Israel will not frustrate God's covenant with Israel. "The part of the dough" and "*the root*" refer to the patriarchs (28). "The whole batch" and "*the branches*" refer to Jewish and Gentile believers. In the Old Testament "the cultivated olive tree" represents the nation of Israel, God's covenant people (24; Jer 11:16-17). However, this does not mean that every Jew belongs to God's people and will be saved. All the people of the nation of Israel, who do not believe and obey, are cut off from God's covenant people and will never be saved. But all Jews, who do not persist in their unbelief and disobedience, will certainly be saved forever. This *severity* and *kindness* of God towards the nation of Israel will certainly be the same towards all the Gentiles. "The branches of the wild olive tree" represents the Gentile believers. By faith the Gentiles are grafted into God's covenant people, but if they do not continue in God's kindness, they too will be cut off from God's covenant people. Thus, the Christian Church of the New Testament period does not replace Israel. It is rather the genuine Israel of the Old Testament period that is continued and extended to include the uncountable Gentile believers of the New Testament period! The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still the root that supports the tree of God's covenant people.

(T) An important truth for me is in **Romans 11:25-32. The fullness of the Gentiles and the salvation of Israel.** Romans 11:25-32 explains the relationship between "the fullness of the Gentiles" and "all Israel". The "mystery" is no longer a secret, but a revelation or unfolding of God's plan of salvation. What the Old Testament prophets did *not* know, God revealed to the apostles, namely that God's future plan of salvation includes believers from the Gentile nations with believers from the nation of Israel *through the preaching of the gospel*. Gentile and Jewish Christians will *together constitute "the people of God"* (the "Israel of God", Gal 6:16, the Church of the Old and New Testaments, 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10). *Together they will inherit God's promises made in the Old and New Testaments* (2 Cor 1:20). In Romans 11:25-26, Paul especially emphasises that the mystery lies in the fact that "the true Israel", that is, "all Israel" or "the fullness of Israel", must wait for the "fullness of the Gentiles" before it can ever again be revealed in its unity as a part of "the people of God". At the beginning of the New Testament period, Israel was divided and apparently abandoned by God. The picture of Israel at the beginning of the New Testament period is unrecognisable and temporary. At the end of the New Testament period the picture will again be complete. The fullness of Israel will again be manifest when the fullness of the Gentiles has been reached. The full number of the Jews and the full number of the Gentiles, whom God chooses and calls, will be manifested at exactly the same time, that is, at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 11:1-36 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (11:26). What is the meaning of the words "all Israel"?

(T) First. The relationship between verse 25 and 26. "The salvation of all Israel" is not the mystery, but the *consequence* of the mystery. The mystery reveals that the inter-dependence between the partial rejection of the nation of Israel and the salvation of many Gentiles *is the way in which* the salvation of the fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of Israel or "all Israel" is being accomplished.

Second. The term "all Israel" cannot be *extended* to include "all the people of the nation of Israel throughout the centuries". It would then refer to the universal salvation of all Jews who have ever lived. This view would ignore the fact that throughout the Old and New Testaments, God has rejected and judged the unbelieving and disobedient Israelites to hell (Dan 12:2; Mt 8:12). In Romans 9:27, Paul explicitly excludes the universal salvation of Jews.

Third. The term "all Israel" cannot be *limited* to "the whole nation of Israel existing in the last days". Nor can it be limited to "the great mass of Jews living in the end-time". This would exclude many millions of Jews, who have lived before the end days, and would regard them as not belonging to "Israel".

Fourth. The term "all Israel" does not refer to the *physical* nation of Israel. Paul rejects the nationalistic concept of Israel when he says in Romans 9:6 that "*not* all the descendants of the nation of Israel belong to the true Israel". People are never saved on the basis of their natural descent (cf. Rom 2:28-29).

Fifth. The term “all Israel” refers to the total number of Jews that *God chose and called throughout the Old and New Testament periods*. It refers to “the sum total of all Israel’s remnants throughout the centuries”, for example “the remnant” during Isaiah’s time (Isa 1:9; 2:4) and “the remnant” during Paul’s time (Rom 11:5). Paul is not concerned with how great this number might be, but Revelation 7:9 speaks of “a great multitude that no one could count” and this certainly includes very many Jews!

2nd Question. (11:26). When will all Israel be saved?

(S) **First.** In verse 25-26, Paul says that Israel experiences a partial hardening *until* the full number of Gentiles has come in. The Greek text does not say: “*Afterwards* all Israel will be converted”. Paul does not imply that in the future after the fullness of the Gentile believers have entered God’s kingdom, there would be *an interim period* of time in which Israel would be converted. No where does the Bible even *allude to* an interim period of time between the entrance of the Gentile believers into God’s kingdom and the final end of the world (Mt 13:37-43; 24:21-31; 25:31-33; 2 Pet 3:7-13; Rev 20:11-15). Paul is speaking of the way in which Jews are being saved now in the present time and throughout the New Testament period until the second coming of Christ. He says, “*and in this way* all Israel will be saved.” He says that the interdependence between the partial rejection of Israel and the salvation of Gentiles is *the way in which* God not only accomplished the salvation of the full number of people from the Gentile nations, but also accomplishes the salvation of the full number of people from the nation of Israel! The *time* the full number of saved people from the nation of Israel will be reached will *coincide* with the time the full number of saved people from the Gentile nations is reached! Not *before* nor *after* that!

Second. In verse 11-12 Paul does not speak of the conversion of Israel in the end-time, but of *the conversion of Israel throughout history*. Israel must be provoked to envy *now in our present history* and that was exactly what the apostle Paul did in his own ministry (30-31). Thus, what belongs to “all Israel” at the end-time, is *gathered throughout the centuries through the preaching of the gospel*.

Third. In verse 23 Paul does not prophesy that “all the people belonging to the nation of Israel throughout the centuries” or “the whole nation of Israel existing at that time” would persist in their unbelief till the end-time. Paul has in view a principle that is true throughout history for both Jews and Gentiles, namely that people can only be saved through faith after they heard the preaching of the gospel. As in Romans 10:14-17, Paul sees no other way for the conversion of Israel than through the preaching of the gospel in the historical present and their responding to God’s condition of personal faith. The history of salvation from the first to the second coming of Christ *runs parallel* for Jews and Gentiles. The way of salvation for Jews and Gentiles is *the same* (10:12-13). God’s covenant with Israel *includes* the Gentiles (Gen 12:3) and *demand*s faith from both Jews and Gentiles (1:16; 11:23). Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles in every age will not be saved (2:9; Mt 8:11-12; 21:42-44). Believing Jews and Gentiles throughout the centuries constitute *one organism*, symbolised by the one olive tree (11:17-24). The opportunity for both to be saved will end at the second coming of Christ (Mt 25:10-13). The *partial* salvation of both Gentiles and Jews continues throughout the centuries until the second coming of Christ, when the full number of saved Gentiles and the full number of saved Jews will have been reached simultaneously.

3rd Question. (11:26-27). To when do the prophecies in verse 26-27 about the salvation of Israel refer?

(T) The Old Testament prophets were thinking of what Jesus Christ would do at his *first coming*, not what Jesus Christ would do at his *second coming*. At his first coming the Messiah would not deliver from this or that enemy, but from sin and godlessness. And at his second coming he will not come “out of Zion”, but “out of heaven” (1 Thes 4:16) and then the “forgiveness of sin” will no longer be possible anymore. Paul was not deviating from his theme in the letter to the Romans, namely, the justification by faith only. Romans chapters 9-11 show that the doctrine of justification by faith is *historical*. They show that Jews were justified by faith during the whole Old Testament period (4:1-8; 9:25 to 10:8; 10:16-18). Jews are justified by faith during the time of the apostle (10:9-15). And this will continue to be the only way of salvation throughout the centuries until the second coming of Christ (11:23,26-27).

4th Question. (11:28). In what sense is Israel first an enemy and later a beloved?

(S) The context (30-31) of verse 28 shows that Paul is not speaking of “the natural nation of Israel”, but of “all the people of Israel that now constitute the true Israel”. *The enemies and the loved ones are one and the same people*. As repeatedly happens in history, the Jews are first hostile to Christ and the gospel, and are thus “enemies” of Christians. But when they later turn and become Christians, they show that they are also “loved ones”. Then God promise to the patriarchs is also fulfilled in them (Gen 22:17-18).

5th Question. (11:29). In what sense are God’s gifts and calling irrevocable?

(T) Verse 29 cannot refer to God’s love for the physical nation of Israel, a love that first loves and tolerates the hardened hearts of all Jews throughout the centuries and then in the end-time saves all of them. God’s election of the nation of Israel during the Old Testament period was *an election unto privileges* and *not an election to salvation!* God’s

inner and effectual calling unto salvation is irrevocable, because it is based on his eternal election (8:28-30). It is not subject to change and is never withdrawn.

Likewise, God's gifts to the nation of Israel during the Old Testament period were temporary privileges (9:4-5). The gifts that are irrevocable therefore refer to God's special grace, such as faith, hope, love, peace that passes all understanding, eternal life, etc. Therefore God's irrevocable gifts and calling can only pertain to *the elect among the people of Israel* and not to all the people of the nation of Israel. This is illustrated in verse 30-31 by the conversion of the elect Gentiles and the elect Jews in history.

6th Question. (11:32). In what sense does God have mercy on all people?

(S) Verse 32 says, "For God locked up all in the prison of disobedience in order that he may have mercy on them all." The verse begins with the word "for" and summarises the passage in Romans 11:25-32. It deals with all the people comprised in "the fullness of the Gentiles" and all the people comprised in "all Israel" (the fullness of Israel"). Just as the word "all" in Romans 5:18 must be interpreted in terms of its context, which is Romans 5:17, likewise the word "all" in Romans 11:32 must be interpreted in terms of its context, which is Romans 11:25-32. Paul is not speaking of all the Gentiles and Jews in the history of this world. He is speaking only of *all the elect* among the Gentiles (the fullness of the Gentiles) and the Jews (all Israel). By nature, all these Gentiles and Jews were locked up in the prison of disobedience. Before their conversion they were all sinners (3:10,23) and condemned (5:18). However, after they believed in the gospel, God graciously has mercy on them all by justifying them through faith (1:16-17; 3:24; 5:17-18).

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.** Due to shortage of time, we will skip the application and prayer.

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use "the five steps" Bible study method to prepare Romans chapter 12.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".