

**“All Israel Will Be Saved: An Attempt to Survey and Synthesize Different Approaches To
Romans 11:26a”**

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Few verses in the New Testament have generated as much conversation, controversy, and consternation among biblical scholars as Romans 11:26a, where Paul concludes: “And thus all Israel will be saved” (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται *kai houtos pas Israel sothesetai*) [my translation]. The problem lies not in the words themselves, since the vocabulary and grammar of this assertion are clear enough. Rather the difficulty for exegetes is how to understand this claim in light of the rest of the epistle to the Romans. How does the statement square with all else Paul has said about salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? *How* will all Israel be saved? When will this happen? What does Paul mean by all Israel? The answers--or any tentative answers--to these questions will help us understand not only what Paul was arguing in Romans 9-11, but also help Christians determine how to relate to the Jewish people.

Scholars of the New Testament have put forward numerous solutions to the problem(s) which Romans 11:26a poses. Some have taken Rom 11:26a at face value and have used it to (re)interpret what Paul has written up to this point. That is, *all* (ethnic) *Israel will be saved*, irrespective of faith in Christ Jesus. This position has been put forward most strongly in the writings of Krister Stendahl. He comments, “The whole of Israel will be saved. He doesn't say Israel will accept Jesus Christ. Since Romans 10:17, or in some manuscripts since 10:9, Paul has not mentioned the name Jesus or Christ.”¹ For Stendahl, Jesus Christ makes it possible for *Gentiles* also to become the people of God--which Jews already are. Christ is for the Gentiles, and Jews will be saved with or without faith in Christ.²

¹ Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 38, see also *passim*. Scott Hafemann provides an excellent explanation for why Paul shifts from Christ-language to God-language in Romans 9-11; “The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25-32: A Response to Krister Stendahl,” *Ex Auditu* 4 (1988): 38-58, especially 54, where Hafemann concludes: “Paul's God-centered doxology, therefore, is not an attempt to downplay the Gentile allegiance to Jesus, but is intended to show the Gentiles that all, both Jews and Gentiles, will one day be worshipping the same Father together for the same reason, namely, his electing mercy in Christ (cf. the parallel between 11:35 and 9:16).”

² See Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 1-7 *et passim*. Stendahl certainly is not the only one to put forth this view, that Israel has another way (*Sonderweg*) of salvation apart from faith in Christ.

Not all have accepted Stendahl's (re)interpretation of Paul and his writings, particularly with respect to the issues raised by Rom 11:26a.³ Stendahl offers broad strokes of reinterpretation which the details of the biblical texts cannot bear. If all (ethnic) Israel will be saved irrespective of faith in Christ, then whence Paul's anguish in Rom 9:2-3?

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ⁽³⁾For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. (NRSV)

If Israel *already* is saved--that is, its future salvation is already certain--and the issue for Paul is only how the Gentiles may become heirs to the promises God made to Israel,⁴ then Rom 9:2-3 make no sense.⁵ In addition to Rom 9:1-5, A. Andrew Das raises other objections to Stendahl.⁶ Why does Paul call Jesus the Messiah (ὁ Χριστός *ho Christos* in Rom 9:5) if Jesus' messianic role has nothing to do with the Jews? Why should Paul see his mission to the Gentiles as a means of making the Jews jealous such that they will be saved if the Jews already have their own means of salvation? Rom 10:12-13 appears to state that God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile with regard to salvation. And how is one saved?

If you confess with your lips and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom 10:9, 12-13)

Paul is too consistent in how he proclaims that salvation is through faith *centered on Jesus Christ*.⁷

³ See the reasoned and sympathetic critique by Scott Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25-32: A Response to Krister Stendahl," *Ex Auditu* 4 (1988): 38-58; also A. Andrew Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism: A 'Newer Perspective' on Paul and the Law," Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, 1998, 147-158. I would like to thank A. Andrew Das for making available to me his unpublished dissertation.

⁴ See Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 2.

⁵ See Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism," 148-149: "It is inconceivable that Paul would even consider such extreme measures [Rom 9:3] if Israel's fault were merely a lack of understanding of faithfulness with respect to God's plan for the Gentiles."

⁶ See Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism," 147-152.

⁷ See Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25-32," 54, citing also E. P. Sanders, "Paul's attitude toward the Jewish People," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 33 (1978): 175-187, 182-183.

Perhaps Paul does not mean Jews and Greeks alike must call in faith upon the name Jesus Christ; perhaps Rom 10:5-13 does not apply to Jews. But note the very next verse (Rom 10:14):

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

Context suggests strongly that the Jews are the subject of Πῶς οὖν ἐπικαλέσονται εἰς ὃν οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν; πῶς δὲ πιστεύσωσιν οὗ οὐκ ἤκουσαν; πῶς δὲ ἀκούσωσιν χωρὶς κηρύσσοντος; in Rom 10:14. Therefore Paul's soteriology throughout the epistle is consistent, and Rom 10:5-13 applies to ethnic Israel. With respect to Rom 11:26a and its immediate context,⁸ Stendahl's reading of Romans does not fare well against a close reading of the text.

We see that since Paul asserts consistently that salvation is through faith centered on Jesus Christ, it is difficult to argue--as Stendahl and others have done--that Israel has another means (*Sonderweg*) of salvation apart from faith in Christ. Some scholars have therefore focused their attention on the πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ *pas Israel* "all Israel" of Rom 11:26a. Clearly not all of (ethnic) Israel had faith in Christ when Paul wrote his epistle. So what does Paul mean by *all Israel*?

Some have suggested that πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ refers not to ethnic Israel but to an Israel of faith; *Israel* means the people of God which includes Jewish and Gentile believers.⁹ Those that redefine Ἰσραὴλ thus frequently cite Gal 6:16: "Peace upon them, and peace also upon the Israel of God" καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ). But this reading of Gal 6:16 is itself problematic; attention to the grammar of Gal 6:16 suggests that τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ does *not* include Gentile believers at all.¹⁰ The correct interpretation of Gal 6:16 aside, in Romans Paul uses the term Israel in a way which consistently excludes Gentiles. Why does Paul describe Israelites as kindred according to the flesh in Rom 9:4-5 if in Rom 11:26a Ἰσραὴλ has to do only with faith? Whence Paul's anguish over Ἰσραηλιῖται in Rom 9:4 if Ἰσραὴλ in Rom 11:26a simply means the people of God who believe in Christ? If Ἰσραὴλ in Rom 11:26a does not mean ethnic Israel then the rest of Paul's discussion in Romans 11 makes little sense. No, Paul consistently distinguishes between Gentiles and ethnic Israel throughout Romans 9-11, and it is unlikely Gentiles are included in the Ἰσραὴλ *Israel* of Rom 11:26a.¹¹

⁸ I mention Rom 11:26a because in other ways Stendahl's (re)interpretation of Romans is valuable. See Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25-32," 54-55.

⁹ For example, Hervé Ponsot, "Et ainsi tout Israel sauvé; Rom. XI, 26a," *Revue Biblique* 89 (1982): 406-417.

¹⁰ See Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism," 155n38; Stendahl, *Final Account*, 5; and E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), 173-174.

¹¹ See comments by Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism," 153-155.

Another possibility is that πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ refers to a future mass conversion of ethnic Israel.¹² Such an interpretation attempts to hold together two premises: that (1) Rom 11:26a states clearly *all Israel* will be saved; and that (2) nevertheless, salvation throughout the epistle to the Romans is only through faith in Christ, both for the Jew and for the Gentile.¹³ This interpretation discerns within Romans 11 an apparent temporal sequence.

- (1) Through their [Israel's] stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make them [Israel] jealous. ⁽¹²⁾Now if their stumbling (is) riches for the world, and if their defeat (is) riches for Gentiles, how much more (will mean) their full inclusion! (Rom 11:11b-12)
- (2) For if their rejection (is) the reconciliation of the world, what (will be) their acceptance but life from the dead! (Rom 11:15)
- (3) And even those, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in (ἐγκεντρισθήσονται *engkentristhesontai*)... (Rom 11:23a)
- (4) How much more these natural branches will be grafted back (ἐγκεντρισθήσονται) into their own olive tree. (Rom 11:24b)
- (5) And thus all Israel will be saved (σωθήσεται *sothesetai*)... (Rom 11:26a)

Although there are no verbs--present or otherwise--in Rom 11:12 and 11:15, we can infer that Paul refers to a future event. This is all the more clear in light of the future verbs in Rom 11:23a, 24b, and 26a. One day Israel will be included, will be accepted, will be grafted back in, will be saved--and, in light of Paul's soteriology, all this *will happen* through faith in Christ. But when? Hofius discerns in Romans 11 clues which indicate not only *when* but *how* Israel will be saved through faith in Christ. Astutely he frames the issue thus:

The question arises, however, whether Paul intends the expression "all Israel" to be taken synchronically or diachronically. Does he [Paul in Rom 11:26a] have in mind only the Jews alive at the end time--synchronic--or is he thinking of Israel of all times--diachronic? A conclusive answer cannot be found.¹⁴

Hofius proceeds to adduce evidence for the *diachronic* view. He notes the similarity between Rom 11:26a and the famous statement in (Mishnah) *Sanhredrin* 10:1, "All Israel will have a

¹² This possibility is strangely absent from the three plausible interpretations (of Romans 9-11) offered by Charles Cosgrove in *Elusive Israel: The Puzzle of Election in Romans* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), especially 1-25.

¹³ See discussion in Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism," 157-158 and notes.

¹⁴ Otfried Hofius, "'All Israel Will be Saved': Divine Salvation and Israel's Deliverance in Romans 9-11," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin (Supplement)* 1 (1990): 35.

share in the world to come,” an apparent reference to the time after the resurrection from the dead. He also notes Rom 11:15, which compares Israel's acceptance to *life from the dead* (ζωή ἐκ νεκρῶν *zo ek nekron*) a phrase he argues denotes the general resurrection.¹⁵ And how will this happen?

Hofius directs our attention to Rom 11:26b-27, drawn from Isa 59:20 and Jer 31:33 (LXX): “The mixed quotation has by no means merely a supportive function but is intended primarily to indicate the *manner* of the salvation of Israel at the end time.”¹⁶ The deliverer (ὁ ῥυόμενος *ho hruomenos*) to whom Paul refers is apparently Christ.¹⁷ Thus all Israel will not be saved by the preaching of the gospel, but by direct encounter with Messiah:

“All Israel” is thus saved in a *different* way than the Gentile Christians and the “remnant,” which already believes in Christ, namely, not through the evangelistic preaching of the church. Instead “all Israel” is saved directly by the Kyrios himself. But that means that it is *not* saved without Christ, *not* without the gospel, and *not* without faith in Christ.¹⁸

Not all will agree with the specifics of Hofius' interpretation. Some question the christological interpretation of *the deliverer* ὁ ῥυόμενος in Rom 11:26b.¹⁹ Some might prefer to believe Israel

¹⁵ Hofius, ““All Israel Will be Saved,”” 35-36. For the diachronic use of “all Israel,” see also Mal 3:22.

¹⁶ Hofius, *ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷ See Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 194 for support of this interpretation of Rom 11:26b. But note Sanders' word of caution:

But for the present question, whether or not Paul thought of the salvation of Israel apart from Christ, it matters little whether he understands “the Deliverer” to be God or Christ; for it is incredible that he thought of “God apart from Christ,” just as it is that he thought of “Christ apart from God.” ... We return here to a point made earlier. There should be no hard distinction between “theocentric” and “christocentric” strains in Paul's thought. It is God's will that all be saved through Christ. It is God who hardened part of Israel, it is God whose word will not fail (Rom. 9:6), and it is God who will see to it that all Israel is saved, though this does not happen apart from Christ. (*ibid.*, 194)

¹⁸ Hofius, ““All Israel Will Be Saved,”” 36-37, 37.

¹⁹ Mary Ann Getty, “Paul and the Salvation of Israel: A Perspective on Romans 9-11,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 461. See also Jennifer Glancy, “Israel vs. Israel in Romans 11:25-32,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 45 (1991): 198, where she writes:

The redemption of Israel does not follow their willing conversion to Christianity, but rather occurs through God's invasion of the human sphere. The catalyst to Israel's

will experience mass conversion resulting from the “evangelistic preaching of the church.” Others might believe the conversion will occur before the general resurrection--but otherwise do not know how the conversion will take place.²⁰

A fourth approach understands πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ in Rom 11:26a as referring to a believing Jewish remnant. Other passages in Romans provide ample precedent for this interpretation. In particular, Rom 9:6b states that “not all who come from Israel are Israel” (οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ *ou gar pantes hoi ex Israel houtoi Israel*).²¹ Thus Paul states clearly that not all of ethnic Israel are considered Israel with respect divine election, that is, with respect to God's promises to Israel. And later in Rom 11:5 Paul asserts, “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.”

At first glance, the Old Testament roots of the phrase *all Israel* seem to support this view. William Osborne, after summarizing several different interpretations of Rom 11:26a, attempts to show that “‘all Israel’ is a technical term which has its roots in the Old Testament, especially in the books of Chronicles.”²² In sections of Chronicles which describe the period of the United Kingdom, the phrase “all Israel” (כּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל *kol-yisra'el*) has a military emphasis--the troops and military leaders of Israel who crown David, who capture Jerusalem, who support David when his kingship is in dispute (1 Chr 11:10; 19:17; 12:30; 12:39--compare different expression in 2 Sam 5:1; 5:3). Besides a military emphasis, כּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל can include the political and religious leaders of the tribes of Israel (2 Chr 2:1; 5:4; 7:4-8). During the period of the Divided Kingdom, the Chronicler consistently uses כּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל to describe all the *assembly* of Israel when acting in an official capacity (2 Chronicles 10), those who are loyal to the cult of Yahweh and the Davidic house (2 Chr 11:3; 11:13), or the people of Judah (2 Chr 12:1; 24:5)--in short, the Chronicler for this portion of Israelite history uses כּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל to describe those loyal to the king and the cult of Yahweh, whether they are from the Northern Kingdom (Israeleans, to use H. L. Ginzberg's term) or from Judah. When the Chronicler employs the phrase *all Israel* during the period after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, it appears to continue the sense of the phrase during the Divided Kingdom(s)--those loyal to the cult of Yahweh and who attach themselves to the Davidic house, even if they are from the North. Osborne concludes:

salvation does not seem to be preaching of the church, but an encounter with the eschatological Lord.

²⁰ Das' discussion of the mass conversion theory is brief and does not address *when* and *how* to the extent Hofius does. Does Das think the conversion is effected by preaching the gospel, or directly by Christ (so Hofius)? It appears he favors the former: “God always had the power to graft ethnic Israel back in (11:23), and that power will be exercised *prior to* the eschaton” (emphasis added); Das, “Beyond Covenantal Nomism,” 157-158, 158.

²¹ In my limited exposure to Stendahl's writings, I have been unable to locate if and where he addresses Rom 9:6b and how it might pose a challenge to his broader interpretation of Romans 9-11. This may represent another example of how the details of the text do not bear the weight of Stendahl's highly *generalized*--if well intentioned--readings of Paul.

²² William Osborne, “The Old Testament Background of Paul's ‘All Israel’ in Romans 11:26a,” *Asian Journal of Theology* 2 (1988): 282-284, 284.

‘All Israel’ in its final definition is a term signifying the representatives of Israel who attach themselves to the Davidic figure, the king, in an expression of loyalty. This suggests that in Romans 11:26a ‘all Israel’ is a term designating a majority of people loyal to the messiah, the Davidic figure.²³

Osborne's evidence and subsequent arguments are worth considering,²⁴ especially in light of Rom 9:6b, yet there is more to consider than the Old Testament usage of a particular phrase. Some scholars examine not only the Old Testament usage of particular phrases, but the Old Testament context of biblical quotations which Paul employs in his epistle. This can be seen particularly in the work of Richard Hays and those scholars who have been influenced by him.²⁵ There are some 30 direct or indirect quotations of the Hebrew Bible throughout Romans 9-11. Do those quotations serve only to reinforce the points Paul makes in these chapters? Or is it possible that the quotations represent textual gateways into a larger and *older* theological world which influences how we read the New Testament? Cosgrove is worth quoting at length on this point:

Paul's use of scripture doubles back on the *canonical* Paul, warranting the use of Paul's dialectical hermeneutic in reading both Paul and the Old Testament. That double hermeneutic would entail the sort of typological reading of the Old Testament that has often been justified in the name of Paul... but it would also require a counterreading, in which Paul himself became a type to be interpreted in the light of the Old Testament. Thus the canonical Paul justifies a dialectical conception of the hermeneutical relationship between the Testaments. The Old

²³ Osborne, “The Old Testament Background of ‘All Israel,’” 284-287, 287. Oddly enough, Osborne's next sentence reads: “It is a collective word used for a whole people who may or not have saving faith.” Why stress that in Chronicles *all Israel* refers to a remnant loyal to Yahweh and the Davidic (or messianic) line, in Romans refers to those faithful to the messiah--only to suggest it may include those *not* loyal to the messiah whom Paul clearly identifies as Jesus Christ?

²⁴ Osborne goes on to test his conclusion against Romans 9-11; *ibid.*, 288-290. Note particular his qualifying remarks in *ibid.*, 288: “[Paul] briefly reviews Israel's history and states the principle that ‘they are not all Israel who are from Israel’ (verse 6). The thought seems to be that ‘there is an “Israel” within ethnic Israel.’ It is clear that this ‘Israel’ has a different meaning than that found in the books of Chronicles. *This does not negate the relevance of the approach taken* for here Paul is arguing that physical descendance is not the basis by which God chose his people, Israel” (emphasis added).

²⁵ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

Testament is to be read in the light of the New Testament, but the New Testament is also to be read *hermeneutically* in the light of the Old.²⁶

What happens when we trace Old Testament quotations back to their original contexts, and allow those contexts to guide our interpretation of *New Testament* passages?

At least two themes confront us when we consider Old Testament passages to which Paul refers in Romans 9-11: the theme of God's unexpected mercy, and the theme of the *remnant*. After his famous cry of anguish in Rom 9:1-5, in Rom 9:6-13 Paul quotes the Hebrew scriptures five times: (1-2) Gen 18:10 and 18:14 in Rom 9:9; (3) Gen 21:12b in Rom 9:7; (4) Gen 25:23 in Rom 9:12; and (5) Mal 1:2-3 in Rom 9:13. The last of these is particularly interesting. The quotation Mal 1:2-3 follows an exchange between God and Israel: "I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have you loved us?'" (Mal 1:2a; NRSV). Edom (Esau) seems to be faring better than Israel, and Israel asks God if he is being faithful to his covenant promises. God responds, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (Mal 1:2-3). Although Esau was the firstborn, God chose Jacob the younger. And God reminds Israel of its unexpected election--Jacob over Esau--even though God *is* displeased with Israel because (a) it is not taking worship seriously (Mal 1:8), and (b) even the Gentiles revere the name of God (Mal 1:11; 1:14).

The other references from Genesis reinforce this theme of election or unexpected mercy. Although Ishmael was born to Abraham first, God chose to fulfill his promises through Isaac, the second born. Even though Esau was born first, God chose to fulfill his purposes through Jacob the younger. Paul himself brings out this point: "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants" (Rom 9:8; NRSV). God surprised Abraham by promising a child to him and Sarah precisely when that idea seemed laughable (Gen 18:10). God surprised Abraham by fulfilling his promises to Abraham not through Ishmael the firstborn but through Isaac the younger. And later God surprised Isaac and Rebekah by choosing not Esau but his younger brother, Jacob the trickster.²⁷ Has God's word to Israel failed if not all of Israel has believed in Jesus Messiah? Paul reminds his readers, "For not all who come from Israel are Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants" (Rom 9:6b-7). Only *some* of Abraham's descendants were chosen by God, and God chose them in a surprising and unexpected manner.

Another theme is that of the remnant. This theme in Romans 9-11 has been noted by nearly every scholar I consulted for this study, and it is clearest in Paul's reference to the experience of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 (Rom 11:1-6). Elijah thought he was the only one left faithful to Yahweh, but "what is the divine reply to [Elijah]? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal'" (Rom 11:4). Hafemann comments:

The point of the parallel to Elijah is not that Elijah or Paul or the small remnant of the Jews that are currently being saved (cf. 9:27-29) are all alone. The point is the promise to

²⁶ Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 57. See also Frank Thielman, "Unexpected Mercy: Echoes of a Biblical Motif in Romans 9-11," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1988): 175.

²⁷ See Thielman, "Unexpected Mercy," 175-177.

Elijah and to the remnant of Paul's day that their experience points forward to the salvation of a greater number. Rather than judgment on all the rest, the significance of the small, persecuted remnant is that their experience is a symbol of hope for the future of the people.²⁸

Those that interpret $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$ Ἰσραήλ (Rom 11:26a) to mean a believing remnant are right--to a point. The theme of the faithful remnant recurs throughout Romans 9-11, and in the Old Testament *all Israel* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) usually refers not to every ethnic Israelite but to those who are faithful to Yahweh and the Davidic (messianic) line. But if only a small, believing remnant of ethnic Israel *will be saved* (so Rom 11:26a), then how does that show God's faithfulness to Israel throughout history? Paul is not only concerned about how God will be faithful to Israel in the future, but how God has been faithful in the past and is faithful in the present:

It is one thing to posit a future salvation of Israel that will fulfill God's word, but it is quite another to show how God is being faithful *now* to his promises to Israel in spite of the fact that most of those who belong to Paul's "kinsmen according to the flesh (9:3) have rejected the Messiah. In regard to the trustworthiness of God's character, faithfulness in the future is worthless without faithfulness in the present.²⁹

It is at this point I would attempt to pull together all these points, all these considerations, all these different threads of the discussion. So far we appear to have established the following:

- (1) *all Israel* (Rom 11:26a) does not refer to Jewish and Gentile Christians;
- (2) salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ;
- (3) *all Israel* refers to ethnic Israel, if not all then at least a remnant;
- (4) in Romans 9-11 Paul discusses the unexpected, surprising mercy (or election) of God;
- (5) in Romans 9-11 Paul also emphasizes the role of the *remnant*, a sign of God's faithfulness to his people;

What I propose is: *all Israel will be saved* means all ethnic Israel will be saved--because of the faithful remnant, and because of the surprising and unexpected mercy of God.

Many of the scholars I consulted alluded to different signs of hope for Israel in Romans 9-11, but none attempted to combine these different signs into one coherent interpretation. For centuries Israel was chosen by God over other nations (Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau) who may have been older, larger, and more powerful. Now just as God chose the younger (Israel) over the older in the past, so in the present God chooses the younger (the *Gentiles*) over the older

²⁸ Hafemann, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 11:25-32," 49.

²⁹ Hafemann, *ibid.*, 44.

(Israel). But just as in Christ the Gentiles have experienced God's unexpected mercy, so Israel will experience God's unexpected mercy *again*.

At a deeper level Paul echoes a motif in one of Israel's programmatic biblical stories that shows God displaying his mercy in unexpected ways and on unexpected people.

This sword, however, cuts two ways.... It also silences Gentile Christians, now in the majority in Rome, who have used their newly gained positions of power to disenfranchise their fellow Jewish believers both socially (chapters 14 and 15) and theologically (chapter 11).... Unbelieving Israel is now the second born and the unexpected candidate for God's mercy.³⁰

As for the remnant motif, the remnant is not only those who are chosen, but also those who preserve the whole. The Hebrew Bible contains numerous examples where because of a faithful few, God has mercy on the whole people: "For the sake of divine righteousness the minority of a righteous remnant has a preserving function for the wicked majority."³¹ Thus all ethnic Israel will be saved, and the sign that this is so is a believing remnant in the present (or in the time Paul wrote)--and Paul himself is a member of this remnant (see Rom 11:1).

In a sense, what I have suggested is that at least three different interpretations of Rom 11:26a are correct, but correct at the same time and in ways their proponents might not have expected. There is a *Sonderweg*, a second means of salvation for the ethnic Israel: the whole will be saved because of the presence of a believing remnant. As Paul explains in Rom 11:16, "If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy." If part of Israel believes in Jesus Messiah, then their salvation means salvation for the whole. There is a believing *remnant*--but Jewish Christians are not the only part of *all Israel* who will be saved. And finally, there may also be a future mass conversion--see Rom 11:15; 11:26b-27--but this is probably not the result of evangelistic preaching by the church; more likely God directly and personally saves his people.

As Hafemann comments, one cannot discuss the interpretation of Rom 11:26a without dealing with the question of whether or not Christians should maintain a mission to the Jews.³² On the basis of the above discussion, I believe that in his epistle to the Romans Paul is more concerned with *reverent caution* than with *missionary zeal* with regard to the Jews. What *about* the Jews? he asks. As long as there is a believing remnant, Paul's conclusion in Rom 11:26a should be taken at face value. *All Israel* will be saved--although in a way few might expect.

³⁰ Thielman, *ibid.*, 179.

³¹ Gerhard Hasel, cited in Hafemann, *ibid.*, 50.

³² Hafemann, *ibid.*, 55.

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