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Romans 11:25-29 Exegetical Paper

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brother: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

I - Introduction

Among the most heavily debated passages of scripture in evangelical protestantism is the end of Romans 11. Paul's magnum opus describes the need for a savior, the way of salvation, and what we do as a result of this salvation. On these things, most are in agreement. In Romans 9-11, however, Paul discusses the status of the Jewish people in the post-Christ era. Herein lies a large source of disagreement, and for good reason. Questions pertaining to the Jewish people, the nation of Israel, and how the church fits into all of this are important for believers to understand, as it shows us where our hope lies, who the recipients of covenant promises are, and even what the ultimate plan of God is. For this reason, it is important to understand what Paul means in Romans 11:25-29, which is the summary of his argument as to what God's plans are for his people after the death of Christ until the end of the age.

II – Four Common Interpretations

Throughout the history, there have been four primary interpretations of this passage within orthodoxy, that is to say an interpretation that is acceptable for a regenerate Christian to hold. Views such as all Jews in every time (including the pharisees, and those clearly portrayed as not saved) being

saved, or the ethnic Jewish people being completely cast off such that no Jew post-Christ will ever be saved will not be considered as a simple reading of the text will show these to be absurd and unbiblical. Rather, the four views of this passage under consideration have been held by a variety of godly men, coming from various traditions and therefore should not be considered heretical or casually written off.

The Historic Reformed View

The first view to be considered is the historical reformed view. This is not to say that all who are of the Reformed¹ tradition hold to (or held to) this view or that other views are inconsistent with reformed covenant theology, rather it is called historical as it was the view of St. Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and many others in the reformed tradition. This view interprets Romans 11:25-29 as referring to the way in which the Church, which is synonymous with what Paul calls “the Israel of God” in Galatians, will be saved. Thus, the passage describes the salvation of a remnant of Jews occurring simultaneously with the salvation of gentiles. Together this process is summarized by Paul when he says “all Israel will be saved.”

The Salvific Process View

Though there are many in the reformed traditions who hold to the historic view, there are many today who hold to a different view. They would disagree that “all Israel” refers not to Jews and gentiles, but instead to believing Jews alone. They would, however, agree that the passage describes a process over time. Thus, this view argues that Paul is describing how all elect Jews throughout history will be saved alongside believing gentiles. Like the previous, this view does not separate Israel and the church, but instead focuses on salvation of the Jews, who are added to the church.

The Mass Salvation View

¹ “Reformed” often can be used as an umbrella term for any evangelical holding to the so-called 5 points of Calvinism. In this context, and unless otherwise stated in this paper, “Reformed” refers to those of confessional reformed traditions such as Presbyterians and Baptists who hold to the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

Many throughout church history have held what I have called the “Mass Salvation” view such as Charles Hodge, Matthew Poole, and R.C. Sproul. This view does not understand the passage to be referring to a process over time, but prophesying of a significant future event. According to this view, at some point in the future, the time of gentiles being added to God’s people will cease and the vast majority of ethnic Jewish people will be saved. It is important to note that according to the mass salvation view, the large number of Jews being saved in the future will become part of the church, not a distinct and separate people. Some believe that this will happen on an individual level – that large numbers of Jews will be saved, not *necessarily* as a nation, while others believe that the majority of Jews will be saved as a nation, though still grafted into the church of God, alongside gentiles. Matthew Henry describes this view as such

The extent of it: *All Israel shall be saved*, v. 26. He will *have mercy upon all*, v. 32. Not every individual person, but the body of the people. Not that ever they should be restored to their covenant of peculiarity again, to have their priesthood, and temple, and ceremonies again (an end is put to all those things); but they should be brought to believe in Christ the true Messiah whom they crucified, and be incorporated in the Christian church, and become one sheep-fold with the Gentiles under Christ the great Shepherd.²

The Dispensational View

Though there are many schools of dispensationalism, almost all agree that in the end of Romans 11, Paul describes not only a mass salvation of ethnic Jewish people, but a restoration and gathering of said Jewish people into a nation that receives the yet-unfulfilled (in the eyes of the dispensationalist) promises of the old testament, made to the Jewish people. Thus, Paul not only describes their salvation and restoration as a nation, but also their receiving and dwelling in the land of the Canaan, the physical,

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2224.

earthly (current, not new earth) reign of Jesus on the throne of David, and many other things. It is widely agreed upon that this will be accomplished in a literal 1000 year millennial reign of Christ. All of this must take place in this particular way, because as Paul says, “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.”³

Commonalities Between the Views

As with any disagreement among brothers in Christ, it is important to note a few commonalities among these views in order to foster charity in the face of disagreement. That all of these views see a future for the Jewish people cannot be denied. The disagreement is not over whether or not God cares for the Jews or has a plan for the Jews, but rather what will happen to the Jews *given that God cares for them* and what His plan will consist of. Furthermore, all of these views acknowledge and necessitate that the salvation of the Jewish people, however it plays out, must be by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. Regardless of what God’s plan is, salvation will be in Christ. Finally, none of these views believes in a final and ultimate casting off of the Jewish people. Paul could not be clearer that God still cares for and has a plan for the Jews, on this all four views agree. It therefore is essential that fellowship not be broken over one’s view of Romans 11:25-29 and that in all things charity and graciousness be extended to brothers in Christ with whom we disagree.

III – The Broader Context of Romans

In order to properly analyze these four views, and, more importantly, understand what the text says, it will be necessary to briefly look at the book of Romans leading up to 11:25 so as to avoid interpreting a text outside of its context. This overview of the context will focus most heavily on the passages that pertain to Romans 11:25-29.

3 GotQuestions.org. “Will All Israel Be Saved in the End Times (Romans 11:26)?” GotQuestions.org, November 13, 2013. <https://www.gotquestions.org/all-Israel-saved.html>.

It is widely agreed upon, by conservative and liberal scholars, that the letter to the Romans was written by the apostle Paul between a.d. 55 and 57. Rome, being one of the most important cities in the world at that time was mostly home to gentiles, though there Jews residing there as well. It is certain that the Roman church consisted of Jews and gentiles, with gentiles likely being the majority. Ultimately, Paul's letter was written for the encouragement of the church, and is, as R.C. Sproul writes, "Paul's fullest, grandest, most comprehensive statement of the gospel."⁴

Paul begins his letter with a greeting to the church in Rome, stressing his desire to see them and his hope to take the gospel to Spain. Paul states "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16) Showing that the gospel of salvation is for all who believe.

He continues on in 1:18-32, establishing the sinfulness of the gentiles and the wrath that comes upon them as a result. After this, he speaks to the sinfulness of the Jews, who have broken God's law and will by nature be judged as law breakers. In this, God shows the commonality between Jew and gentile: all by nature are sinful and will suffer wrath as a result, with or without the law (3:9). In this, Paul explains something that will come up later on, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (2:28-29). Paul is showing that not all those who are biologically related to Abraham can rightly be called Jews if their hearts are not right with God.

After showing that all are guilty before God, Paul now begins to tell of the gospel. Showing that justification is not by works of the law, but by faith. Both Jew and gentile are justified by faith (3:30). Among the most significant examples of this, the Patriarch Abraham's example of faith is shown. Abraham was the biological father of the Jewish people and the one to whom the Abrahamic covenant was made. Paul shows that Abraham was not justified by works of the law of Moses, indeed it would

⁴ R. C. Sproul, ed., [*The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version \(2015 Edition\)*](#) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1975.

have been impossible, for he was born centuries before the law was given. From this, Paul shows another (and far better) aspect of commonality between Jew and gentile, that both are true children of Abraham if they share his faith. Paul shows that Abraham was justified before his circumcision (the physical sign marking the Jewish people) making him the father of the uncircumcised (gentiles) who have faith, as well as those who are not merely circumcised physically (Jews), but also share the faith of Abraham. This shows that in Christ, it is not biology that ultimately matters, but faith. It is not insignificant that Paul points back to Abraham. In showing that gentiles are *children* of Abraham (4:12, 16) Paul seemingly implies that the gentiles and the Jewish believers are people, and as one people, both inherit the promises made to Abraham. This is consistent with Paul's broader theology, as he describes faithful gentiles to be "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29) and later on calls the church, consisting of Jew and gentile "the Israel of God" (6:16). It is clear then, that Paul sees one people of God, where the gentiles are added in as a result of faith. With no indication from the text that the gentiles would not receive the promises made to Abraham and his posterity as well as the natural understanding of "heir" and "offspring," it would seem that the clear and simple reading of the text is that in Christ, there is one people of God, who has one plan for these people.

Paul continues to preach the gospel, showing that we are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We were dead under Adam, who sinned and plunged all humanity with him into death, but in Christ, through His death and resurrection, we have life. As a result of this, we ought to consider ourselves dead to sin, not living as law breakers, but living righteously as servants of God. There is still indwelling sin, but for those in Christ, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1) Those in Christ are given the Spirit of God and called fellow heirs with Christ. Paul ends his wonderful picture of the gospel by showing that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (8:39).

IV – The Immediate Context of Romans 9-11

Paul, however, recognizes that for the Jewish Christians in Rome it may seem that God's word has failed. For a great many Jews have rejected Christ (and their leaders put Him to death), and now a great many gentiles have been brought in and saved. Paul, anticipating this objection, now speaks to God's divine purposes. Paul writes, echoing his earlier argument that physical circumcision lacking faith in Christ is insufficient, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (9:6). That is to say that not all who are biologically descended from Abraham are among God's elect. Isaac and Jacob were chosen, but Ishmael and Esau were rejected, all according to God's divine purposes. Thus, in Paul's day, there were many Jews who professed faith in Christ and were among the elect, while many rejected Him and accordingly were not "children of Abraham" though they descended from him.

Salvation has come to many gentiles because they have embraced it by faith (9:30), yet many Jews have rejected it because they sought salvation through works of the law (9:32). Paul once again emphasizes the unity of those who have faith in Christ, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (10:12-13). Paul continues, urging the believers to go and preach the gospel, that many would be saved. He now begins the discourse that will culminate in the passage at hand.

Paul asks "has God rejected his people?" (11:1) undoubtedly referring to the Jewish people. He answers "By no means!" showing that he, an Israelite has been saved and is therefore a living piece of evidence that the Jews have not been rejected. He points the readers to the prophet Elijah, who was reminded by God of the remnant within Israel that consisted of only 7000 faithful people. Similarly, Paul notes, there is a remnant at the present time of elect Jews. Paul reminds the readers that what is presently happening in the hardening of Jewish hearts has happened in the past. As he wrote 2 chapters earlier, God saves and hardens who he chooses, according to his divine purpose and glory.

Yet, Paul anticipates another question, have the Jewish people stumbled and been hardened in such a way that they are rejected forever? Characteristically, Paul responds “by no means!” He shows that the hardening of the Jews has led to the salvation of the gentiles, which in turn will make Israel jealous. He shows that branches have been broken off from the olive tree, which is likely a reference to Jeremiah 11:16 and Hosea 14:6, thus referring to Israel, God’s people. Those Jews who were unfaithful and rejected Christ have been broken off from the tree. In their place, the gentiles, having faith, are grafted in despite being unnatural branches. This adds to the existing theme in Romans, that God has one people consisting of Jew and gentile united by their faith in Christ. Here we see the gentiles being grafted into the Israel of God. Is this then cause for the gentiles to be arrogant towards the Jewish people? No, for Paul reminds the gentiles that just as God broke off the natural Jewish branches, so too will he break off the unnatural gentile branches if they do not continue in faith (Romans 11:22). The natural branches, now broken off, will surely be grafted back in if they profess faith. Paul emphasizes that God will indeed graft the natural branches back into the tree, bringing great blessing.

We now come to the passage at hand. Paul warns warns his readers against being wise in their own sight.

a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.⁵

5 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:25–29.

V – Keys to Understanding the Passage

As with any heavily debated passage of scripture, there are various interpretive “keys” that lead to one’s conclusion. In this passage, there are at least six important keys that will lead to a correct understanding of the passage. If, therefore, we are to understand and properly interpret this passage, we must understand the keys.

Key 1: The Partial Hardening

The first key to understanding this passage is the phrase “a partial hardening” found in 11:26. This translation is consistent across the ESV, NAS, and CSB. The RSV simply states “a hardening” without including the word “partial” or something similar. The KJV translates this phrase as “blindness in part.” The meaning of the “hardening” or “blindness” is not overly complicated. It is the cause of the Jewish branches in Paul’s illustration being broken off: unbelief. The far more influential aspect of this phrase then, is “partial.” Specifically, whether Paul intends “partial” to be understood logically or temporally.

In essence, the question of a temporal or non-temporal hardening is the question of whether the phrase should be understood as simply “part of Israel has been hardened” or “for a time, Israel has been partly hardened.” The first indicates that the hardening will persist (though necessitates that a remnant will be saved throughout this hardening) while the second indicates that the hardening will cease, implying that the whole will at some point in the future be saved.

Godly men throughout history have taken both positions to be the plain reading of the text. Calvin states “‘In part,’” I think, refers not simply to time, nor to the number, but means, in a manner, or in a measure; by which expression he intended, as it seems to me, only to qualify a declaration which in itself was severe.”⁶ while MacArthur writes “This mystery [the partial hardening] has two

⁶ John Calvin and John Owen, [Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 436.

components: 1) Israel has experienced a partial spiritual hardening, and 2) that hardening will last only for a divinely specified period of time.”⁷

It does seem to be more likely, however, that it is a logical rather than temporal hardening. The Greek word, μέρος, is used 41 times in the New Testament, many of them by Paul. Of these 40 (not including 11:25) uses, only one can *potentially* be called temporal, while the other 39 are logical. Thus, given that the vast majority of the time μέρος is used logically, it is likely that it is used logically here as well. It should be noted, that context is a better determiner of meaning than usage in other passages. Thus, looking solely at these two words is insufficient to conclusively determine the meaning of this key. In this case, the meaning of key 2 will give illumination.

Key 2: Until

Combined with the previous “key,” Paul writes “a partial hardening has come upon Israel, **until** the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” (11:25). As with “partial”, we need to determine whether “until” is logical or temporal.

In English, this distinction is more challenging to understand. Temporally, “until” can be understood like this: A occurs until B, and then A necessarily ceases. Thus, temporally, this verse would be understood to mean that the partial hardening ceases upon the fullness of the gentiles are brought in. In the logical sense, however, it is understood in this way: A occurs until B, but B occurring does not determine the state of A after this. The phrase “the runner ran up to the 3 kilometer mark” does not necessitate that he cease running at the 3 kilometer mark, he may continue running indefinitely, stop and take a break, or do virtually anything else; the “up to” does not determine what happens after the 3 kilometer mark. Similarly, according to the logical understanding in the case of this passage, the partial hardening on Israel occurs up to the fullness of the gentiles being brought in, but does not offer information as to what comes next.

⁷ John MacArthur Jr., ed., [The MacArthur Study Bible](#), electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1715.

As with the previous key, it will be helpful to understand more about the word itself, and how it is used in scripture. O. Palmer Robertson explains that based on the original Greek⁸, a logical understanding is best.

The phrase rendered “until” (*achris hou*) is essentially terminative. More particularly, it indicates *the terminus ad quem* rather than the *terminus a quo*. The phrase brings matters “up to” a certain point or “until” a certain goal is reached. It does not itself determine the state of affairs after the termination.⁹

He then shows how this word is used throughout the new testament in order to prove his point. Acts 22:4 says that Paul’s persecution of believers was “until” the point of death. After a believer died, his persecution did not cease. 1 Corinthians 15:25 speaks of Christ reigning “until” all enemies are put in subjection to Him. The subjection of Christ’s enemies does not mean the end of his rule. In both of these cases, as well as others, the “until” is not determinative of the future state. As Robertson says, “The subsequent circumstances can be learned only from the context.”¹⁰ Thus the “partial hardening until” describes a state that persists up to something else occurring, but does not describe or indicate what comes next. It is then best to understand 11:25 as referring to a logical partial hardening being upon the Jews up to the fullness of the gentiles being grafted in.

The influence of this key is identical to the previous. The historical reformed and salvific process views see a logical “partial” and “until,” while the mass salvation and dispensational views see both as temporal.

8 In my research (albeit limited), it was curious to note that those arguing for a temporal “until,” seemingly based their arguments on the English understanding of the word. Very few even acknowledged the Greek at all.

9 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 179.

10 Ibid.

Key 3: And in this way

As compared to the previous 2 keys, less discussion is needed for this one, as the original language (and ESV translation) shows that this key is best understood logically rather than temporally. The NAS95 translates this as “and so...” as does the KJV, and others. This is not to be understood to mean “and then,” but is best understood as “and in this way...” as the ESV translates it. The reason for this is explained well by Robertson.

The phrase *kai houtos* simply does not mean “and then.” Instead, it means “and in this manner” or “and in this way.” Of the approximately 205 times in which the word *houtos* occurs in the New Testament, not once does it have a temporal significance. Paul easily enough could have said *kai tote*, “and then.” But instead he says quite specifically *kai houtos*, “and in this manner.” A dramatic recoloring of Romans 11:26 emerges as a result of this more precise rendering of Paul’s actual words: “And *in this manner* all Israel shall be saved.” In such a manner, by such a process, thus, by this means, in the way described, Israel shall be saved.¹¹

It is therefore best to understand verse 26 as being the result of verse 25, but as being the description of it.

Key 4: Culmination or Summarization?

At this point, having discussed the previous 3 keys, we step back and look at the passage as a whole. Among the four views given, two (dispensational and mass salvation) see 11:25-29 as the culmination of Romans 11. That is, the argument of Paul has been building up to the point where he reveals that at some point in the future, all Israel will be saved. The other two (historic reformed, and salvific process) are more likely to see this passage as a summary of Romans 11. This means that

¹¹ Ibid. 181–182.

Romans 11:25-29 is not introducing a new concept, but recapitulating what Paul already described in verses 11-24.

Of these two options, it makes most sense that Paul is giving a summarization, rather than a culmination of what came before. In verses 11-12, he describes the breaking off Jews, salvation coming to the gentiles, and the blessing that will come when the Jews are grafted back in. This concept is repeated again in verses 15-16. Next, he gives the illustration of the olive tree, showing that Jewish branches were broken off because of unbelief, wild gentile branches were grafted in, and Jewish branches that do not continue in their unbelief will be added back in. What the apostle describes in 25 is the partial hardening of unbelief coming upon Israel, which necessitates the presence of a remnant of believing Jews. This hardening persists alongside the fullness of the gentiles being added in. Verse 25 does not then seem to be the culmination, but a final summarization of the concept that Paul has repeatedly put forth – that a remnant of believing Jews and gentiles who have faith will be saved.

Key 5: All Israel Will be Saved

Of the five keys, this is likely the most important. What does “all Israel” mean? Among the four views given, each differs, albeit slightly at times, as to its understanding of “all Israel”. This key becomes especially tricky to understand when trying to determine what Paul means by “Israel.” It could be said that in verse 26, Paul is clearly referring to the Jews, as verse 25 and verse 28 both seem to be describing just that. However, we must remember that in Romans 9, Paul uses the term “Israel” to mean two separate things in the same sentence. We therefore cannot simply rule out that Paul may be referring to something else in this passage. What then does “all Israel” mean?

The context of the passage, and for that matter, the book, has been God saving one people consisting of Jew and gentile for Himself in Christ Jesus. Gentiles are called children of Abraham and elsewhere described as the “Israel of God.” Paul, immediately before this passage, describes the process by which God will save His church. The remnant of the Jews believing in Christ by faith,

alongside the gentiles who believe in Christ by faith being added to the tree. The branches that were broken off are added back to this tree if they have faith. Paul describes this entire process, saying “in this way, all Israel will be saved.” Given the logical nature of the previous keys, and that 11:25-26 is most likely a summarization of what came before, it makes the most sense to assume that when Paul says “all Israel will be saved,” he is referring to the process by which God will save His church, consisting of elect Jews and gentiles. Calvin describes this position well,

Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word *Israel* to all the people of God, according to this meaning,—“When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God’s family.” This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world. The same manner of speaking we find in Gal. 6:16. The Israel of God is what he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles; and he sets the people, thus collected from their dispersion, in opposition to the carnal children of Abraham, who had departed from his faith.¹²

This is further proven by the scripture that Paul references. Paul writes “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” referencing Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9. This passage clearly speaks of the coming of Jesus Christ, bringing salvation to those who turn from their sins. This is not unique to believing Jews, but true of faithful gentiles as well. The covenant spoken of is

¹² John Calvin and John Owen, [Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 437.

almost certainly referring to the new covenant, of which gentiles are full recipients. For while Moses stood before the nation Israel and inaugurated the old covenant, Jesus was before his apostles who would be the cornerstones of His church, when he inaugurated the new covenant. If then, the new covenant is for those who believe in the redeemer, this covenant is rightly understood to be for the believing gentiles as well as the believing Jews. The Spirit is given to the gentiles and Jews, which is promised in Isaiah 59:21. The sins of the gentiles and Jews of faith are forgiven in Christ, which is promised in Isaiah 27:9, also referenced by Paul, further proving that these promises are fulfilled in the church, which is the Israel of God.

Furthermore, it would make sense that in referencing the end of a prophecy, Paul had in mind the promise in its entirety. Therefore, we also should consider Isaiah 59:19, “So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.” This passage clearly shows people from the west and the rising of the sun (undoubtedly referring to gentiles) coming and fearing the name of the LORD. It would seem then that Isaiah predicted the grafting in of the gentiles. Thus, when Paul references this chapter, he seems to have in mind the redemption of Jew and gentile into one body. There were indeed Jews who were enemies of the church in Paul’s day, and many Jews in modern times continue to reject Christ, but of these branches broken off, God has chosen and kept some for Himself. That God is using the grafting in of gentiles to bring elect Jews to Himself shows the Jewish people are beloved.

Therefore, based on the context, which is among the best determiners of meaning, it makes the most sense to conclude that “all Israel” is intended by Paul to refer to the church, consisting of Jews and gentiles.

Key 6: For the Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable

God's faithfulness is seen clearly in that He presently does what He often did in the old testament, remembering the covenant made with Abraham. In this covenant, God promised to be the God of Abraham as well as his descendants after him. As such, God has chosen in every age since to preserve a remnant for Himself among the Jewish people to be the beneficiaries of His sovereign grace and mercy. Thus, the natural and unnatural, though both true children of Abraham, are given the covenant promises and blessings: to receive the world (Romans 4:13), but more importantly, that God would say to us "I will be your God, and you will be my people."

That this statement refers to salvation is supported by the context that follows. Paul does not speak of the "gifts and callings" as referring to anything but salvation. For he says "For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (11:30-32). We see then that Paul is speaking of salvation.

VI – Analysis of the Four Views

In light of the analysis of the six interpretive keys, we will now examine the four views previously described.

The Dispensational View

While much of my analysis has come to different conclusions than the dispensational view, there are strengths to this view that should be acknowledged. Of the strongest, the dispensational view acknowledges and emphasizes the continuing and unbreakable nature of the Abrahamic covenant. While Paul does refer to the descendant of Abraham being Christ, it remains true that the physical descendants of Abraham are still beloved by God and not

completely cast off. Furthermore, this view acknowledges the continuing relevance of the Abrahamic covenant, even under the new covenant administration.

That being said, there are weaknesses to this view that make it untenable, even if opposite conclusions are come to for keys 1-5. The dispensational view sees this passage as proof of the land being given to a restored nation of Israel, ruled by Christ physically on the throne of David in a future millennium. Whether the dispensational understanding of the fulfillment of old testament promises is biblical is beyond the scope of this paper, but it ought to be stated that neither Romans 11:25-29 or the rest of the book for that matter says anything as to the land of Canaan or a future millennial rule. Paul is not concerned in this passage about the land or a millennial kingdom, but instead election and salvation. He is not building an argument that culminates in Israel's reconstitution as a nation, return to the land, and reigning in a future millennium, but one that culminates in God's faithfulness to the Jewish people through His preserving a remnant for Himself and saving the elect descendants of Abraham.

Another weakness to this position is that Romans 11 does not seem to separate Jew and Gentile into separate people with separate plans, but rather, alongside the rest of Romans, shows that God is gathering both groups into one, who are united by faith in Christ. When Paul shows that gentiles with faith are children of Abraham, after showing the commonality between Jew and gentile, it does not follow that he would then separate these two people in a later passage. Indeed, as we saw, he does the opposite.

The plain reading of the text simply does not support this view, even if concessions are made as to the logical/temporal nature of verses 25 and 26. Coming to the conclusions necessitated by the dispensational view seems to require a reading in of the system rather than looking at what the text itself says. Paul's concern is salvation and election, thus we should not seek to set the focus on something else.

The Mass Salvation View

In the mass salvation view, we also find a unique strength. If the keys as described above are in fact temporal and not logical, this is the view that would make the most sense. Unlike the dispensational view, the mass salvation view does not go beyond the text in that it describes the mass salvation of Jews at some point in the future. Additionally, this view is incredibly optimistic and shows a great hope in God restoring the Jewish people who have, as a whole, rejected Him for thousands of years. Finally, this view allows for a mass salvation of Jewish people in the future as a part of God's plan, yet does not separate Israel and the church into different entities with different plans. This view emphasizes the unity of God's people by showing that the future salvation of Jews will involve them graded back into the church.

The primary weakness of this view, however, is that the interpretive keys are more likely logical than temporal. Beyond this, there do not seem to be many significant weaknesses to this view, and having argued that the interpretive keys are best understood logically, I will simply conclude that this view is unlikely.

The Salvific Process View

This view has at least two primary strengths. First, the salvific process view rightly understands most of the keys and correctly differentiates between logical and temporal in verses 25 and 26, thus it rightly understands that the passage is not referring to a future event, but rather is descriptive of a process. Second, this view has a strong consistency when understanding the word "Israel." Some would certainly argue that the more straightforward view of 25-29 is that Paul refers to the same group of people whenever he says "Israel." If one finds the view convincing, this view would then make the most sense.

It is not, however, without drawbacks and weaknesses. As with the previous two views, the prophetic scripture referenced by Paul does not seem to fit cleanly. Isaiah is clearly showing

the grafting in of the gentiles and cleansing of their sin, alongside the renewal of the Jews. Paul uses this passage as justification for his statement that “all Israel will be saved.” Thus, while not incorrect, as Paul is describing the fullness of elect Jews being saved, it is incomplete. Paul emphasizes that gentiles are being saved *alongside* the Jewish people, thus it makes more sense for “all Israel” in this instance to be referring to the church.

The Historic Reformed View

Based on what we have seen in the text, this view is the most likely as it properly understands the keys to be logical, summarizing, and referring to the church, not merely elect Jews. Though in the English, this view does not appear to be the plain meaning of the text, when the meanings of the original words are considered, as well as their usage throughout scripture, this view becomes the most straightforward understanding and it is the position of this paper that the Historic Reformed understanding of Romans 11:25-29 is correct.

VII – Application

As the apostle James says, we must not be hearers only, but doers of the Word of God. Therefore, any analysis of the Bible is incomplete without an understand of how we apply it to our lives.

Hope

This passage impacts our hope both by strengthening and calibrating it. God strengthens our hope in Him as Paul reminds us that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). Those who have been saved are truly saved, and this will not be taken from them. In the same way that Abraham’s faith was undoubtedly strengthened by God Himself passing through the animal pieces, ratifying the covenant ceremony, and later on through the covenant sign of circumcision, so too can we rest in the covenant that God has made with us, as

well as the covenant sign of baptism, knowing that he will not remove our salvation from us, because God has declared it irrevocable.

Furthermore, the view supported in this paper is well-applied by calibrating the source of our hope. As Christians, our hope is fully in Christ and His return to judge the living and the dead. While we should care about what happens in the middle east, praying for and weeping with those who weep over the often-broken and violent state of affairs, our hope ultimately does not rest completely or partially in any earthly nation, but in the future new heavens and earth. Our hope is not in a return to the shadows and types of the old covenant system (or the any shadows and types of the old testament for that matter), but our hope is rightly in the fulfillment of these things, that the perfect lamb of God has been sacrificed once for all sins and that no future sacrifice is necessary.

Rest

Just as Romans 11:25-29 ought to strengthen our hope, so too should it cause us to rest in Christ all the more. In this passage we saw that despite their rejection of Christ, God continues to preserve and save a remnant of Jews in each generation of the church, and will do so to the end of time. This shows the love and faithfulness of God and should cause us to rest in Him all the more. God is sovereign over every thing in every time, including salvation, and He promises that all things are worked together for the good of those who love Him. We may not understand His purposes at all times, but we can understand and trust that He is working all things together for the good of His people, and ultimately, to His glory.

Passing the Torch

Paul warns the gentiles against growing arrogant in Romans 11. Some Jewish branches were broken off due to unbelief and the gentiles grafted in due to faith. In a similar way, if the Jewish branches receive saving faith, they will be grafted in, while the gentile branches will be

broken off if they profess unbelief. Thus, each generation of the church ought to take great care that the next generation does not assume that they are saved on the basis of having parents who profess faith, but instead must profess the same faith themselves in Christ, lest they be broken off due to unbelief. While God is sovereign over the salvation of every generation, this passage reminds us that it is the duty of us all to foster a personal faith in Jesus with the generations after us.

Unity

Tragically, Romans 11:25-29 has been a source of much division among Christians, even those who agree on the vast majority of doctrine. Differences in interpretation, usually between dispensational and covenantal believers, have a tendency to inflame tensions, leading to things such as name-calling and making up strawmen. This all contributing to a lack of charity among brothers in Christ. Ironically, this spirit of division within the church seems to be exactly what Paul is fighting against in his letter to the Romans (and many of his other letters). There is a time for necessary divisions and breaking of fellowship when the given doctrine is a matter of salvation. Though by no means unimportant, it would be inaccurate to call the proper interpretation of Romans 11 a primary or salvific issue. Thus, we ought not to divide or break fellowship with one another over this passage.

Rather, we should understand and apply the unity that is inherently promoted by this passage, regardless of one's view of the text. Regardless of whether one sees Israel and the church as synonymous under the New Covenant administration (or for that matter, the old) or draws a sharp line between the Israel as a nation and the church, all must acknowledge that both Jew and Gentile alike are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have a unity that is greater than traditions, systems of theology, denominations, and indeed any other thing. Paul clearly stressed the necessary unity between Jews and gentiles in the church, surely, we

ought to do the same in recognizing our common salvation, showing love and charity to those we disagree with. Therefore, let us say with Paul, “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).