

God's Three-Phase Plan of Salvation for His One People

Jeremiah 11:16-17; Hosea 14:4-7; Romans 11:11-27

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • October 10, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: As I was preparing this sermon, I sent an email to several of my former seminary professors. I asked them what their views were regarding verse 26 of our text, particularly the statement, “*all Israel will be saved.*” This is one of the most widely debated statements in all of the Holy Bible. I would classify the views into three main views, and these three views all agree that “*all Israel will be saved*” during the last part of the end times just before our Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven.

The *first* main view is a future mass conversion of all or many Jews. Some who take this view believe that all Jews—not merely a large number—will be saved. They teach that even in eternity, there will be a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, thereby, two peoples of God: Israel and the Church. This is the view of premillennialists, those who believe in a secret Rapture, a literal millennium when Christ will reign over a restored national Israel from Jerusalem—all unbiblical teachings. Others, particularly a majority of Reformed theologians, view “all Israel” as a large-scale conversion of Jews, but not all Jews. The *second* main view is that “*all Israel will be saved*” refers to the salvation of all the elect or chosen ones, both Jews and Gentiles. This is the view of the great Reformer John Calvin. And then the third view is that “all Israel” refers to the total number of elect Jews whom God has chosen to save. This is a minority view of Reformed theologians.

In my survey of my professors, I saw a variety of views, which shows that no one should be dogmatic about this subject. Two favor the first view, the large-scale Jewish conversion view; one favors the second view, the “elect Jews and Gentiles” view; and two favor the third view, that the “elect Jews” will be saved. R. C. Sproul favors the large-scale Jewish conversion. So, you may be asking me, “Pastor, what is your view?” And my answer is the third view, the total number of Jews whom God has chosen to save. But will there be a large-scale salvation? That, I would leave to God alone. If you ever read the back-and-forth discussions about this subject, you will conclude that everyone has a point. They all argue from Scriptures.

But back to our text. In the first ten verses of Romans 11, Paul again answers this recurring question, “*Has God rejected his people [Israel]?*” And his answer, again, is a forceful, “*By no means!*” “*Absolutely not!*” He then gives himself as an example of a Jew whom God has saved. His second example is during the time when Elijah complains to God that he was the only one left in Israel faithfully serving God. But God rebuked him, saying, that there are still 7,000 faithful Jews remaining that he does not know about. Therefore, God has not rejected his chosen people. Paul and these 7,000, together with the other eleven apostles, and the Jews in Rome and in many other places were elect Jews, while the great majority were hardened (verse 7).

To show that God has not abandoned the Jews, Paul offers a three-phase salvation plan for the Jews and Gentiles. In verses 11-15, Israel’s trespasses and sins have resulted in salvation of

Gentiles, making Jews jealous. In verses 16-22, Jews are cut off from God's cultivated olive tree to make way for Gentiles to be ingrafted and added to the remnant Jews. And in verses 23-32, after the elect Gentiles are all saved, God will again graft the Jews back into his cultivated olive tree by giving them faith and repentance.

So our theme today is, **God's Three-Phase Salvation Plan for His One People.**

“The Trespass of Israel”

The first phase of God's salvation plan for his people is the unbelief, trespass and disobedience of Israel to his laws. The Jews did not “stumble” over God's laws so that they would “fall.” This was probably how the Gentile believers in Rome looked at the unbelieving Jews in their churches. But Paul says no, God did not allow them to fall as his people completely and finally, even though they were in unbelief and rebellion. God has a more comprehensive plan. He knows the end from the beginning because he had decreed everything that will come to pass before he created the world.

And what is this plan? First, he would allow Israel to be in their state of unbelief and rebellion for a time. Even when their own brother Jesus preached the gospel of salvation by faith alone in him alone, they would not repent and believe. The apostles preached the gospel to the whole Roman empire, and ministers of Christ spread the gospel to the whole world these last 2,000 years. But the harvest of Jewish souls is merely a handful. They continue in their rebellion against God. But people from the whole world are continuing to be harvested by the preaching of the true gospel.

In verse 12, Paul uses another “how much more” comparison. If the unbelief and rebellion of the Jews served to make the salvation of the Gentiles a reality, how much more will the “full inclusion” of the Jews serve to give the Gentiles and the world the riches of God's mercy and blessings? What then does the “full inclusion” of the Jews mean? As was stated earlier, it could possibly mean the salvation of all Jews or of a large number of Jews. If such a large-scale conversion of Jews is God's plan, then there would even be a larger-scale conversion of Gentiles.

Then in verses 13-15, Paul uses another comparison and contrast between God's plan for Jews and Gentiles. The “rejection” of Israel by God is occasion for God to reconcile the world to himself. In contrast, God's final “acceptance” of the Jews will be for them “life from the dead.” This could mean one or both of two things. It could mean the Jews enjoying God's blessings during their large-scale conversion. Or it could mean the elect Jews—a large number of Jews—will be raised from the dead at Christ's Second Coming. This will usher in a complete turnaround in the circumstances of Jews: from “trespass” to “full inclusion”; from “rejection” to “life from the dead.”

In the same way, the “trespass” of Israel ushered in a complete turnaround in the circumstances of the Gentiles. From being eternally lost, they now have “salvation” and the “riches” of God's glory in our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 9:23; 11:33; Eph 1:18).

“The Salvation of Gentiles”

So in verse 16, Paul transitions from Israel's unbelief and rebellion and their rejection by God, to the Gentiles' salvation and riches given by the same God. The Apostle uses two illustrations. The first is the dough offering as firstfruits from Numbers 15:17-21. They were to offer to God a “firstfruits” from a “whole lump” of dough for breadmaking. If the firstfruits of the dough were holy, then the whole lump is also holy. The second illustration is that of a tree. If the root is holy, so will be the branches. Most Bible scholars interpret the “firstfruits” and the “root” as the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This does not mean that since the patriarchs were holy, all the Jews are holy. No, it only means that the patriarchs were the firstfruits and root of God's covenant nation Israel whom God has chosen out of the whole world. This is the meaning here of being “holy.”

This is Paul's segue to his next illustration, and that is of the cultivated olive tree. What is this olive tree? The olive tree is often a picture of Israel in the Old Testament. I read two examples in our Scripture readings. In Jeremiah 11:16-17, the Lord indicts Israel for their unbelief and rebellion. He once called Israel a beautiful, green and fruitful olive tree. But because of their evil and idolatry, God will burn its branches. And in Hosea 14:4-7, the Lord promises to restore Israel his vine to its former beauty and fruitfulness, *“his beauty shall be like the olive... they shall blossom like the vine.”* There is both judgment and restoration of Israel.

These branches that are burned in Hosea's prophecy are the same Jewish branches that are broken off in verse 17. In contrast to the Jews being cut off from the olive tree, branches from a wild olive tree are grafted into God's cultivated olive tree. They are nourished by the good root of the cultivated olive tree. These wild olive branches are the Gentiles from all the nations of the earth that are accepted by God after God rejected the unfaithful Jews. This is cause for rejoicing by these non-Jewish believers who have been saved by God. But not only rejoicing. This breaking off of the Jewish branches caused the Gentile believers in the Roman church to be proud, and maybe even look down upon their Jewish brothers and sisters because of their unbelief.

So Paul warns these Gentiles, *“But you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you”* (Rom 11:20-21). If God rejected and cut the Jews off his olive tree because of their unbelief and rebellion, God would do the same to the Gentiles if they also did not fear him and became unfaithful and rebellious. If God did not spare the natural branches of his olive tree, how much more would he not spare ingrafted branches from a wild olive tree. God's kindness must not be taken for granted, nor must it become a license for disobedience. Otherwise, God's kindness will turn into “severity” or wrath—“you too will be cut off,” you Gentiles.

Now, you might be thinking, “If Jews and Gentiles can be broken off by God if they were unfaithful and rebellious and idolatrous, then does this mean that I can lose my salvation?” If they who were part of God's covenant people, but later were cut off by God, then I have no assurance that I will not also fall from God's grace if I became unfaithful. Yes, you will be broken off from God's olive tree if you became unfaithful all the way to the end of your life. But no, you will not completely

and finally fall out of God's grace if you were truly an ingrafted branch. Why? Because God had promised so in his word. We have studied Romans 8 where we read in verse 30 that God's chain of salvation is *unbroken* from predestination before the creation of the world to glorification in heaven.

Jesus himself taught his disciples that not a single chosen one will be lost, "*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me*" (John 6:39). He assures us, his sheep, in John 10:28, "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand... and the Father's hand.*" In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul assures us that all true believers have been "*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance,*" that is, our heavenly inheritance. God cannot break his promise. The Apostle Peter also comforts us in 1 Peter 1:4 that we were born again to "*an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven*" for us. Lastly, Paul is absolutely sure in Philippians 1:6 that Christ "*who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" These are but a handful of texts that comforts us in our times of doubts about our own salvation. God's promise cannot be broken. If he could create the universe from out of nothing with a few words, then it is nothing for him to guarantee the salvation of all his chosen ones.

But what about those who appeared to be faithful believers and fell? Judas Iscariot was one of Jesus' first 12 disciples who were with him for three years, but later, turned out to be a "son of destruction," meaning eternal hell. Paul mentions several names who were in the church, but who later left the faith (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17; 4:10). This is why John is sure that Judas and these other people who seem to be believers were not saved in the first place, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us*" (1 John 2:19). Those who do not persevere to the end can mean only one thing: they were not truly "born again," so that the thorns and thistles, the cares of this world, choke them out of faith. Therefore, do not wonder why many of those who used to be faithful attendees in our church have departed. Many of them do not even attend any other church, or if they do, they attend false churches that preach false gospels and perform false worship. This is also why the Belgic Confession Article 29 also affirms that the visible church will always be a mixed company of true and false believers.

In the Old Testament, God has prophesied, "*All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*" (Psa 98:3). God prophesied that his Son will be "*a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth*" (Isa 49:6). Then those nations who were formerly enemies of Israel, God's people, will join the Jews in worshipping the true God and receive God's blessing, "*Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance*" (Isa 19:25).

The first phase of God's redemption plan for his one people is God's rejection of Israel due to their unfaithfulness and rebellion. The second phase is the addition of Gentiles to God's one cultivated olive tree.

"The Full Inclusion of Jews"

The third phase is the re-grafting of the Jews into God's one olive tree. How would this happen? Paul says in verse 23 that the Jews will "*not continue in their unbelief... for God has the power to*

graft them in again.” And Paul reveals to us Gentiles that his re-grafting of Jews is a mystery, something that was hidden in the past, but now is revealed to faithful believers. In this age, *“a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”* The mystery is that God’s hardening of Israel is only partial and temporary.

When will this partial hardening end? Paul reveals to us, *“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”* This phrase comes directly from Jesus’ words in Luke 21:24, *“[The Jews] will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* Here, Jesus was prophesying the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. From that time until *“the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,”* Jerusalem will be occupied and controlled by Gentile nations. When did Jerusalem’s occupation by foreign forces end? It ended in 1967, when Israel drove Arabs out of the city during the Six-Day War. From that year until today, Israel has complete control of Jerusalem. Who knows if that is the signpost of the coming end? We know that the fullness or the times of the Gentiles will come when all elect Gentiles from all nations are saved. When this happens, elect Jews—whether a great number, or a remnant—will be grafted back into God’s olive tree. From 1967 until today, we are seeing the conversion of many Jews worldwide. The day when the “full inclusion” of Jews is at hand. Therefore, the end of this age—of which no one knows—is at hand. And this will complete God’s three-phase plan for his one cultivated olive tree, his one people and nation.

Beloved brothers and sisters, who will deliver the Jews from their unbelief and rebellion? Isaiah prophesies it is our Lord Jesus Christ, *“The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”* (Isa 59:20). Both Jews and Gentiles whom God has chosen were formerly disobedient people who have received mercy from God. Now both are branches of God’s one olive tree, because the dividing wall of hostility between these two nations has been torn down by Christ Now, God’s people is one body, *“one new man in place of the two... one body through the cross”* (Eph 2:14-16). Therefore, we sing with the hymnwriter,

In Christ there is no east or west, in him no pride of birth; the chosen fam’ly God has blessed now spans the whole wide earth.

For God in Christ has made us one from ev’ry land and race; he reconciled us through his Son and met us with his grace.

This is the most wonderful news in the world in all human history. God had a plan before he created the world to save from sin his chosen people from all nations, tribes and languages. It is incomprehensible, it is mind-boggling, it is dizzying, for Paul and for us. Gentiles who were enemies of God and rebels against God’s laws, and Jews who were formerly rejected by God because of their sins: both will be praising and giving thanks to God in awe and wonderment:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Rom 11:33)