

# “All Israel Will Be Saved”

## An Exegesis of Romans 11: 25-32

By Ronald M. Muetzel

On Christmas Day of 1978 I had the joy of baptizing a 13 year old Jewish girl. On Good Friday of 1979 I baptized her brother and mother. Another brother was baptized in early 1981. At present all four of these descendants of Abraham are believing, worshipping and communing members of our Christian congregation.

I recall the time when the mother described the process by which she became a Christian. It seems she was quite impressed to see that a Christian friend had a “sparkle” on her face when she talked about Jesus Christ. The Jewish woman wanted that “sparkle” for her life too. Now she has it through faith in Israel’s Christ. Now she is one of Paul’s own people “made envious by the Gentiles” (Romans 11:12-14) and “grafted into the olive tree” (Romans 11:23). Her children are also among the people of Israel “who have now received mercy” (Romans 11:31).

For me the experience with this family has served to remove Paul’s teaching concerning Israel, as found in Romans 9 - 11, from the realm of abstract theology and to incorporate it into the life and ministry of Christ’s Church. The things of which Paul wrote are taking place in the Church today.

We give our attention, then, to the eleventh chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, verses 25-32:

<sup>25</sup> Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ ᾔτε [παρ’] ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι, ὅτι πῶρως ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρις οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ <sup>26</sup> καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται, καθὼς γέγραπται,

“Ἦξει ἐκ Σιῶν ὁ ῥυόμενος,

ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ.

<sup>27</sup> καὶ αὕτη αὐτοῖς ἡ παρ’ ἐμοῦ διαθήκη,

ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν.

<sup>28</sup> κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἐχθροὶ δι’ ὑμᾶς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας. <sup>29</sup>

ἀμεταμέλητα γὰρ τὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἡ κλήσις τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>30</sup> ὥσπερ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ποτε ἠπειθήσατε τῷ θεῷ, νῦν δὲ ἠλεήθητε τῇ τούτων ἀπειθείᾳ, <sup>31</sup> οὕτως καὶ οὗτοι νῦν ἠπειθήσαν τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἐλέει, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ [νῦν] ἐλεηθῶσιν. <sup>32</sup> συνέκλεισεν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς πάντας εἰς ἀπείθειαν, ἵνα τοὺς πάντας ἐλεήσῃ.

The Greek text itself presents no particular difficulties. There are no strange forms or disputed word meanings, nothing that has any real effect on the translation. The variant readings are generally agreed to belong in the text.

The closest thing to a dispute over word meaning has to do with καὶ οὕτως in verse 26. The *Living Bible* paraphrase renders: “And then all Israel will be saved.” Legitimate translations don’t even attempt to introduce a time concept into the οὕτως. It is only the interpreters who expect a first stage conversion of Gentiles to be followed by a second stage, mass conversion of all Jews that would like to see a time concept in this word. The word itself does not permit it. οὕτως means “so” or “thus” in the sense of “in this manner.”

It is already apparent that the real issue in these verses is not the meaning of the Greek words; the issue is the interpretation of these words. For this reason, we will be content to use a very acceptable translation of the Greek from the New International Version of the Bible and the paper will concern itself primarily with the matters of interpretation.

## Context

The verses under study appear near the end of Paul's dissertation on the question of Israel's place in the kingdom of God. After these verses all that remains to be said is a beautiful doxology to the "wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11:33).

The ninth through eleventh chapters of Romans, of course, provide the most complete and extensive treatment of the Jewish/Gentile issue as it faced and perplexed the early Christian Church. Verses 25-32 must be understood in the context of these chapters.

This is not to say that chapters nine through eleven are the only part of Scripture to treat the Jewish/Gentile issue. The frequency with which this issue keeps popping up in all the New Testament literature is evidence of the extent to which this matter troubled the churches—especially the churches established by Jewish apostles in Gentile lands with a mixed fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers. Already in chapters two and three of this letter to the Romans Paul made it clear that Jews and Gentiles are alike (no difference) both as to sin and as to justification. The letter to the Galatians rejected any imposition of old covenant Jewishness on either Jews or Gentiles. The entire first half of the letter to the Ephesians had as its purpose to demonstrate that there is no longer a "dividing wall" between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14); all are "one in Christ" (Ephesians 3:6); all are fully "blessed" in Him (Ephesians 1:3). Even the book of Revelation, with its gates on which "were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel" (Revelation 21:12) and its foundation stones on which "were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:14), adds its own peculiar comments to the Jewish/Gentile issue. The four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, as every reader quickly learns, are fraught with the conflict between Jew and Gentile, as well as the resolution of that conflict. Our study will attempt to shine the light of these and other scriptures on the assigned verses in order to make our understanding as clear as possible.

It will help to keep in mind a distinction between the Gospels (Acts) and the Epistles as they treat the Jewish/Gentile issue. During the ministry of Jesus Christ and the early mission thrust of the apostles there was a need to encourage Jewish disciples to make disciples of Gentiles from all nations. However, as more and more Gentiles entered the kingdom and saw people of the Jewish race despise their own Christ, these Gentile disciples had to be encouraged not to shut the doors of the kingdom on all Jews. Paul's purpose in Romans nine through eleven was undoubtedly that all Christians imitate the example of his "unceasing anguish" for "those of his own race" (Romans 9: 2-3).

Though the assigned verses run only from 25-32, I am of the opinion that they form a unit with verses 17-24. Here Paul repeats himself three times with the result that the sections of 17-24, 25-27 and 28-32 are remarkably parallel. Each contains a warning against Gentile pride or exclusiveness. Each connects Israel's failure to believe with the Gentile opportunity to believe. Each presents a seeming contradiction with regard to Israel—that Israel is both "cut off, hardened, disobedient" and at the same time "grafted in, saved, recipient of mercy." Verses 25-32, then, are not a progression on from verse 24. They constitute, rather, a double repetition of the point Paul already made in verses 17-24.

verse 25 — "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

Paul's introductory remark about ignorance is one which he made at least three other times in his letters—First Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; First Thessalonians 4:13. When Paul said, "I do not want you to be ignorant," it is evident that Paul was anxious to share some spiritual insight which would keep his readers from acting wrongly. In the other usages ignorance allowed to continue might have resulted in: "hearts set on evil

things” (First Corinthians 10:6); misuse of “spiritual gifts” (First Corinthians 12:1) or grieving as though we “have no hope” (First Thessalonians 4:13). In this usage, too, Paul wanted to remove ignorance and thereby prevent wrongdoing.

Among the Romans the possible ignorance on the part of the “brothers” related to a specific “mystery.” Paul’s “brothers” would seem to have been the Gentile believers in Rome. For one thing, Paul had singled them out in verse 13 of this chapter. Also, the Roman congregation had become predominantly Gentile. Finally, Paul was about to clarify a peculiarly Gentile ignorance by sharing this “mystery” with them. It should be said, however, that Jewish believers in Rome who would read this letter were not meant to be excluded from brotherhood with Paul. If anything, they were doubly Paul’s “brothers.”

The “mystery;” what was it? Not something beyond understanding. Not something to be kept secret or mysterious. Rather, it was a truth that had been revealed by God. Paul delighted to be used by God to reveal His mysteries. The Gospel itself was such a mystery (Ephesians 6:19). The Christ and Church marriage, the twinkling-of-an-eye-resurrection change, the supremacy of Christ were other mysteries. However, the “mystery” of which Paul spoke most often was this “that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ” (Ephesians 3:6). At times Paul revealed this mystery in such a way as to invite “near” the Gentiles who had once been “far away” (Ephesians 2:11-12; Romans 16:25-26). In our verse Paul revealed the same mystery with a somewhat different purpose: that the Gentile believers not “become conceited” and pridefully withhold the Gospel from Jewish people.

Martin Franzmann’s description of the ‘mystery’ is worth repeating:

Christ is the disclosure of the mystery of God, the revelation of His long counsels of salvation that worked in strange and secret ways for long ages, all through the dark and inconspicuous history of His little people Israel. In Christ that mystery has been disclosed; God’s plan now works on the stage of universal history, from Jerusalem to Rome, and will work . . . to the ends of the earth. All nations now shall know the God who hid Himself so long in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Paul’s presentation of the mystery in verse 25 is nothing other than an expansion of and application of the Jewish/Gentile mystery. Paul says: “Israel has experienced a hardening in part...” *πώρωσις* is a term that has already been used in verse 7 of chapter 11. It indicates, to use Lenski’s terms, “judicial, punitive, final petrification, the result of self-hardening.”<sup>2</sup> It was not and is not a hardening that could be softened or reversed. Caiaphas typified just this hardening so often evident among some of the people of Israel. Luther described those of Israel who set themselves against Christ as “*stock-stein-eisen-teufel hart*” (stock-stone-iron-devil hard).

While *ἀπὸμέρους* qualifies the *πώρωσις*, it does not limit the “hardening” as to degree as though the hardening wasn’t real hardening. Nor does it limit the hardening as to time as though the hardening was only temporary. It limits the hardening as to number. *Not all* the people of Israel are hardened. Paul himself is an exception. A number is not assigned to the “in part”. We don’t know the number of those who will constitute Israel’s hardening. Nor do we know how many in Israel will be stones softened by God and made into true “children of Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).

How long will this hardening on the part of some in Israel continue? “Until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” Jesus provided all the commentary needed to understand this *πλήρωμα* of the Gentiles. He said, “This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). The end will bring down the curtain on preaching of the Gospel as well as opportunity to believe the Gospel. Until then three things will continue to happen: 1) There will be

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<sup>1</sup> Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Commentary - Romans*, Concordia, St. Louis, 1968, page 282.

<sup>2</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1936, page 719.

Gentiles coming into the kingdom of God; 2) Some in Israel will harden themselves against their Christ; 3) Others in Israel will embrace their Christ and say of Him, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39).

This mystery had to be revealed lest Gentiles withhold the Gospel from Jewish people on the false assumption that the Christ would be rejected. This mystery must be revealed (preached) among us for the same reason.

C.F.W. Walther says well:

True though it be that the Jews have crucified and rejected their own Messiah, still, according to the mystery unfolded by the Apostle, Jews shall be converted as long as Gentiles are converted. Not only will the door of grace remain open till the end, but there shall always be a number of both who actually enter the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup>

Francis Pieper offers this encouragement:

We are assured by Scripture that the door of grace stands open no less for the Jews than for the Gentiles and that God has dispersed the Jews among the Gentiles not to exclude them from salvation, but by the testimony and example of the believing Christians to incite them to believe that in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of the Jews and the Savior of the world has come. Only if this knowledge lives in us will we take the right attitude toward Israel.<sup>4</sup>

verse 26 —“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

‘The deliverer will come from Zion;  
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.  
And this is my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.’”

In *This We Believe* our synod makes the confession: "We likewise reject as unscriptural any hopes that the Jews will all be converted in those final days, . . ."<sup>5</sup> This represents as much a minority position as other of our statements on doctrine.

I was amazed at the number of commentators who expect a general conversion of the Jewish people and base their expectations on this verse. Of course, I expected that Hal Lindsey and others who represent Dallas Theological Seminary would date and forecast a conversion of all Jews—dead and alive. I did not expect that they could appeal to Augustine for support. Why, Augustine even speculated that Elijah and Enoch would be the preachers scheduled to lead the Great Jewish Evangelism Crusade.

I expected to find that fundamentalists, literalists and fanaticists would be on the side of a mass conversion of the Jews. It was a mild surprise to discover that the more level-headed among them, who reject the hype, the date-setting, the daily-news-in-prophecy, still hold to the teaching of a special Jewish conversion. Samuel Allen Creed authored a “Christianity Today” article against “Hotline Prophecy;” yet he insists: “To be sure, we find in Romans 9 that God has not finished with the Jews and still has something in store for them.”<sup>6</sup>

Consider that John Calvin interpreted the “Israel” of verse 26 to be spiritual Israel and it’s surprising that Reformed commentators, with a few exceptions, teach a conversion of physical Israel. Charles Hodge asserts that Reformation era scholars resorted to the interpretation of a spiritual Israel in reaction against “the

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<sup>3</sup> C.F.W. Walther quoted by Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, Concordia, St. Louis, 1953, page 533.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *This We Believe*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1967, page 24.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Creed, “Hot-line Prophecy,” Christianity Today, December 11, 1981, page 28.

extravagancies of the Millenarians.”<sup>7</sup> He defends his view that verse 26 predicts “a great and general conversion of the Jewish people” as the view “generally received in every age of the church.” Hodge may well be right that his is the “generally received” view.

When Martin Luther lectured on Romans in 1517, he indicated that the Jewish people would “return in their own time.”<sup>8</sup> Later writings of Luther reveal a total rejection of the “general conversion” view. Since the Reformation any number of Lutheran commentators have reverted to Luther’s early understanding.

If the New Testament’s only teaching with regard to Israel were the statement that “all Israel will be saved,” we would gladly yield to the majority opinion. As it is, however, to insist that this verse teaches a general conversion of physical Israel can only be blatant disregard for the “scripture interprets scripture” principle.

Circus tricks are required to fit a last-days, general conversion of physical Israel in with Jesus’ assertion that “at that time... the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 25:10-12). How can all Israel experience salvation by a resurrection and conversion of dead Israelites, if “man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27)? Why did the Holy Spirit bother to warn Israelites, “Do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8), if this was a hardening that would be entirely softened? Were the tears Jesus shed outside Jerusalem false tears like the crocodile tears of a child (Luke 19:41)? What was the point of His word to the daughters of Jerusalem, “Weep for yourselves and for your children” (Luke 23:28)? No, so much of Scripture is violated by the general conversion view that one logically ends up with either Christless salvation, universalism or both.

When scripture is allowed to interpret “and so all Israel will be saved,” the only possible conclusion is that spiritual Israel is meant. In the New Testament, especially, Israel is a fluid term used sometimes in a physical sense, sometimes in a spiritual sense. It didn’t trouble Paul at all to set the two uses side by side: “For not all who are descended from Israel (physical) are Israel (spiritual)” (Romans 9:6). Other examples will be cited as the discussion continues. To follow this approach is to conclude that all those who are Israel in a spiritual sense will be saved. This agrees perfectly with Peter’s word to Jews: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Nor does this view require that any other scriptures be twisted or violated.

It would be nice if “the few” who understand Israel to be spiritual Israel would agree as to what constitutes spiritual Israel. There is no such agreement. Lenski, F. Pieper, Hendriksen and others interpret “all Israel” as all *Jewish people* who put their faith in Abraham’s Seed. The other possibility is that “all Israel” includes all *Jews and Gentiles* who believe that Jesus is the Christ. I am persuaded that the second interpretation is the correct one.

Recall the introductory remarks about Paul’s threefold repetition of his thesis concerning Israel! If we check the preceding paragraph for a parallel to “all Israel,” we find an olive tree with wild branches (Gentile) and natural branches (Jewish). If we check the paragraph that follows, we find a parallel to “all Israel” in this that “God has bound *all men* over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.” An earlier statement, “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (Romans 3:9), makes it clear that this parallel to “all Israel” also consists of Jews and Gentiles.

The immediate context supports the same view. “And so” introduces a conclusion with regard to “all Israel.” The conclusion flows out of the points which precede: 1) Physical Israel has experienced a partial hardening, partial because some still believe and are saved. 2) This will continue to be true until the end when all believing Gentiles will have come into the kingdom and been saved. Conclusion: The result of some Jewish people believing and some Gentiles believing is that “all Israel will be saved.”

It is also important to consider the teaching of the entire New Testament on the Jewish/Gentile issue. Jesus and His apostles worked hard to remove the distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians, that is, to identify both as the “chosen people” (First Peter 2:9), as “Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:8) or “all Israel.”

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1950, page 371.

<sup>8</sup> Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 25, page 429.

The One whose ancestry could be traced to Abraham, upon the confession of the Gentile centurion, said, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). At the family table of the patriarchs are set out place cards with the names of Gentiles printed on them so that “all Israel” can feast on salvation.

The One who had long been Israel’s Shepherd (Psalm 23) and called Himself the Good Shepherd said: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen (a reference to Israel). I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be *one flock* and one shepherd” (John 10:16). As this promise of Jesus found its fulfillment in the adding of Gentiles to the flock, one would hardly expect to find a new division into two flocks. “All Israel” is one flock of Jewish sheep and Gentile sheep.

The prophet Amos looked ahead to the day when David’s tent would be “restored, repaired and rebuilt” (Amos 9: 11-12). James, when convinced by Peter, Paul and Barnabas that Gentiles had a rightful claim on the Gospel, quoted this prophecy of Amos (Acts 15:16-17). David’s tent would be in good repair once it sheltered both Jews and Gentiles, or, “all Israel.”

The city of Ephesus housed a Christian congregation with a mixed membership of Jews and Gentiles. To them Paul explained that there had been a legitimate distinction between Gentiles and Israel. Paul went on to say that Christ “has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” The consequence, Paul told the Gentiles: “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but *fellow citizens with God’s people* and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:12-19). To be counted among God’s people is to be included in “all Israel.”

Paul’s letter to the Galatians includes the familiar allegory employing Hagar and Sarah. In effect, Paul turned the facts of the matter upside down in order to include Gentiles in the family of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. The fact was that Jerusalem and its Israelitish citizens had descended from Sarah and Abraham. But Paul denied any kinship between Israel according to the flesh and the child of promise born to Sarah. Instead, Paul assured all the Jews and Gentiles who populated the churches of Galatia: “You, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” (Galatians 4:28). Jews and Gentiles who have been “born of God... to be children of God” (John 1:13) are the spiritual kin of Abraham and Sarah, their son Isaac and all who are truly Israel.

The letter of Paul to the Romans deals with the Jewish/Gentile issue from its beginning. Perhaps the most familiar passage in the first three chapters begins: “There is no difference...” (Romans 3:22). No difference between whom? No difference between Jews and Gentiles as regards sin—“all have sinned” (Romans 3: 23)—and no difference between Jews and Gentiles as regards justification—“all are . . . justified by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). How strange it would have been for Paul, after he had spent chapters establishing the fact that there is no difference, now to introduce a difference among those who belong to “all Israel!”

Return to the verses under consideration, especially the quote of prophecy which Paul used to substantiate the contention that “all Israel will be saved!” These words are taken in part from Isaiah 59:20-21, and in part from the “new covenant” passage of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Together these passages speak of the Redeemer who would come to Jacob (Israel), turn Jacob to repentance, and take away their sins.” Paul and the other apostles knew well the Redeemer’s own word: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to *all nations*” (Luke 24:47). Once Jesus had broadened the prophecies to include all nations it would have been inappropriate for Paul to restrict them to a purely Jewish Israel.

Why limit “all Israel,” as Pieper does, to “the whole number of elect among the Jews?”<sup>9</sup> Paul was generous enough to include those of us who are Gentiles with him in his Israel. Why should we be any more restrictive? Jews and Gentiles together constitute “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

This introduces an interesting question which is too extensive to be treated in this paper: By what right do the scriptures enlarge the term “Israel” to include Gentiles? What warrant is there for this approach? I would like to offer just a couple of suggestions:

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<sup>9</sup> Pieper, op.cit., page 528.

1) At the time of Abram's call, God promised to make him into a *great* nation (Genesis 12:2). This turned out to be the nation of Israel. Or, did it? The adjective "great" might well indicate something more than the relatively puny nation of Israel. Even at this initial call the LORD explained that Abram and his nation were to be an instrument of blessing for "all peoples on earth" (Genesis 12:2-3). Israel's existence as a nation was not to be viewed as an end in itself; Israel was to be a means of blessing for all people.

At a later repetition of the covenant promise the LORD said to Abraham, "You will be the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4). Israel's father was destined to be father of many nations. When the Magi came; when the centurion confessed; when the Ethiopian was baptized; when the disciples made disciples of all nations; whenever Gentiles came to faith in Abraham's Seed—then Gentiles were coming to their father in faith, Abraham; then Gentiles became Abraham's Israel. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed" (Galatians 3:29).

2) Another "Israel-thread" is picked up and pulled through Scripture when a person sees Jesus Christ as a "representative Israel," as a New and obedient Israel" or as an "Israel reduced to one." His birth and life involved a tracing of Israel's history—into Egypt, out of Egypt, through the water, in the wilderness, on a mountain, etc. He obeyed Israel's law and yet was held guilty of Israel's sins (Colossians 3:14) and punished with Israel's punishments (Psalm 22:1). If true Israel is Jesus Christ, and we are "in Christ," then we are Israel just as we are His body, the Church (Ephesians 2,5). Robert Brinsmead is one of those who says: "To be in Christ is to be in Israel."<sup>10</sup>

Verses 28-29 "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as salvation is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

With these words Paul begins to repeat another time. To say that some Jewish people are enemies of the Gospel is not substantially different from the preceding comment on Israel's hardening in part. To say that some respond to the love of God which surrounds them through their patriarchal heritage is not substantially different from saying that not all Jewish people are hardened.

"As far as the gospel... enemies." The church in Smyrna was troubled by "the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). So was the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:9). According to the flesh they were descendants of Abraham. Had they been true Jews, however, they never would have thought to oppose and slander the churches of Jesus Christ. Like so many other fleshly Jews in all of history and in the present, these were enemies of the Gospel.

"God's gift and his call . . . irrevocable." Concerning this Martin Franzmann has written:

No simple scheme of wrath and retribution is sufficient to enclose the inexhaustible workings of the Word of God. That Word once said to Israel, "I have chosen you," and swore fidelity to Abraham and his seed. The men of Israel are not only enemies but also beloved. Go is God and not a man. His gifts and His call have their cause and origin in Him alone; they are not generated by the goodness of man, and they do not evaporate before the badness of man. His gifts and call are "irrevocable," so far as His will to give and to call are concerned. "God's love," Luther says, "does not find the object it can love; God's love creates it."<sup>11</sup>

verses 30-32 "Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Brinsmead, Present Truth, Vol. 5, No. 7, page 51.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Franzmann, *op.cit.*, pages 208-209.

Here Paul draws together all that has been said in a final summation. The “you” are Gentiles who have been brought to faith. The “they” are Jews who will yet be saved. In either case it is divine mercy that covers human disobedience. To say that the Gentile believers “were at one time disobedient” is the equivalent of Paul’s “far away,” “foreigners,” and “aliens” in Ephesians. It is the same as Paul’s “all have sinned” in Romans 3. Yet, mercy has atoned for the disobedience. Mercy has worked repentance. Mercy has been received by a faith worked by mercy. All MERCY.

Among the Jews, too, are those who have “now become disobedient.” This is not to say there had been a time when Jews had not been disobedient. It has already been said, “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (Romans 3:9). These are Jews who will come to a knowledge of their disobedience as Paul had learned to know what sin was through the law (Romans 7:7). These are also Jews who will come to know mercy as Gentiles share with them the mercy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Then for these Jews too it will be all MERCY.

On the human side the great equalizer is sin and disobedience. What the human population has in common are not necessarily arms, legs, eyes, ears, mouths. For some of us those features are missing. All of us, however, share in the disobedience of sin. It is our inherent sameness, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. “God has bound all men over to disobedience.” Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin... that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God” (Romans 3:9&19).

On the divine side is mercy, mercy that shows no favoritism (Acts 10:34), unexplainable mercy, precious mercy, mercy that robs all (Jews and Gentiles) of any ability to boast (Romans 3:27).

That being the case; how ought Gentiles regard Jews? How ought Jews regard Gentiles? When they are one in Christ they ought embrace each other and sing the praise of the mercy that brought them together. At all times Gentile recipients of mercy are to reflect that mercy back on the Jews; Jewish recipients of mercy are to open the riches of their heritage to Gentiles.

Whether we are Gentile pastors, Gentile Lutheran Christians or whether a Jewish mother who wanted the “sparkle” she saw in a Gentile, whether Jewish children who are baptized, instructed, confirmed, we rejoice that we are all “children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). “To Him be the glory forever: Amen” (Romans 11:36).