

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 11: 26-29

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read Romans Chapter 11 and today we will read verses 26 to 29.

Paul used the olive tree to represent the testimony of God's kingdom. God first called the Israelites to become His people under the Old Covenant, a people set apart among the nations to bear witness for Him. Yet, Israel repeatedly failed and was eventually taken captive. Out of the nation, however, God chose a remnant to restore His testimony. From this remnant came Jesus Christ, who fulfilled God's redemptive plan and inaugurated the New Testament time.

In the New Testament, God calls those who believe in Jesus Christ and receive salvation to become His new testament people. These believers are gathered together as the Church to bear witness for God among all people. The saints of the New Testament were originally branches of a wild olive tree, but they have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree to partake of the rich sap from its root. Meanwhile, the Israelites—who were originally the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree—were broken off because of unbelief. Paul warns the New Testament believers not to boast or be proud but to continue steadfastly in God's kindness. Otherwise, they too could be cut off. For the sake of His testimony, God did not spare the original branches, and He will not spare the grafted branches if they fail to bear fruit.

Paul then reveals the mystery of the kingdom of heaven: the testimony of the olive tree must include both the Church and Israel. Though the Israelites are still partially hardened and unwilling to believe, when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in—that is, when the Church has reached its full stature—then all Israel will be saved.

Verse 26: “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’”

What does it mean when Paul says that “all Israel will be saved”? How should we understand the word “all”? Does it include every Israelite— even those who did not believe and have already died? Personally, I don’t think so, because surely among them were those who committed great evil. If all Israelites, including the wicked and unbelieving, were to be saved, that would contradict God’s righteous nature. Rather, it seems that “all Israel” refers to all believing Israelites. We know that once an Israelite believes in Jesus Christ under the New Testament, he or she becomes part of the Church; within the Church, there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile—they are all God’s New Testament people together. Therefore, “all Israel” here cannot simply refer to the believing Israelites who have already become part of the Church.

I personally believe that “all Israel” refers to the unbelieving Israelites who will remain at a particular time—specifically, when the Church has reached its full stature and maturity. At that point, God will once again receive these unbelieving Israelites. Of course, their reception will be conditional—they must turn to God and thus become part of the testimony of His kingdom. Therefore, “all Israel” likely refers to those Israelites who are still living at that time. Paul deliberately adds the phrase “all Israel” to emphasize that this includes all twelve tribes of Israel. In Paul’s day, the term “Jew” had become a general term for people who practiced the Jewish religion—most of whom were descendants of the returning remnant, primarily from the tribe of Judah. Hence, they were called “Jews.” However, the term also included some Gentile proselytes who faithfully followed Jewish religious practices.

Thus, in Romans chapters 1 through 5—where Paul speaks of condemnation and justification—he consistently uses the term “Jews.” But beginning in chapters 9 through 11—where he discusses God’s sovereign election and merciful plan—Paul switches to the term “Israel.” By doing this, he intentionally points back to Jacob’s twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, I personally believe that when

Paul says “all Israel will be saved,” he is referring to the full restoration of all twelve tribes of Israel being included in that “whole household.”

In Paul’s time, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom had already disappeared. When Paul, through God’s revelation, used the phrase “all Israel,” it may have been a prophetic indication that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, the Israelites will once again recognize their ancestral identity and be restored as a nation. This moment likely corresponds to the scene in Revelation chapter 7, when the sixth seal is about to be opened, and 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel are sealed. In Revelation 7:5–8, the twelve tribes are listed by name. Careful readers will notice that the tribe of Dan is missing, and the tribe of Ephraim has been replaced by the tribe of Joseph. There are historical reasons and spiritual implications behind this change, which I will not elaborate here. If we have the opportunity to study Revelation later, we can examine these details more closely.

After Paul speaks of all Israel being saved, he continues, saying, “As it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” Paul does not quote the Scripture word-for-word, but this phrase is drawn from Isaiah 59:20, which says, “The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” says the Lord. The Redeemer here refers to Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesies that Christ will come to Zion, and the house of Jacob will turn away from sin. This passage in Isaiah refers to Christ’s second coming, when He will reign in Zion.

We know that Jerusalem represents the place where man worships God, for there the temple is located; whereas Zion signifies the place of Christ’s kingship, just as King David once reigned from Mount Zion—his royal palace was there, and it was known as the dwelling place of the king. At that time, the house of Jacob—which includes the twelve tribes represented by Jacob’s twelve sons—will turn away from their transgressions. How can we be certain this refers to Christ’s second coming? Because immediately afterward, Isaiah chapter 60 records that all nations will come to worship, bring gifts, and praise the Lord. It is clear that this describes the millennial kingdom, the age when Christ reigns on earth and all nations acknowledge His glory.

Paul quoted the Scripture from Isaiah 59:20, but he made a slight modification. If we read carefully, we will notice that he describes it from Christ's perspective: There will come a Deliverer—that is, Christ Himself. He not only comes to reign in Zion, but also comes forth from Zion; and He will remove all ungodliness from the house of Jacob, meaning from the twelve tribes of Israel. As for how the house of Jacob will turn away from sin, and how Christ will remove the sins of the house of Jacob, Paul goes on to quote further prophecies from the Old Testament prophets to explain this.

Verse 27: “For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”

It also says—of course referring again to the Old Testament Scriptures quoted here—but in this verse, Paul actually combines two different passages. From the origins of these Scriptures, we might catch some clues and attempt to imagine the picture in Paul's mind. The phrase “When I take away their sins” most likely comes from Zechariah 13:1, “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.” This passage tells us that when Christ returns, He will open a fountain for Israel to cleanse away their sin and impurity.

However, before this happens, Zechariah 12:10–14 records that God will pour out the Spirit of grace so that the Israelites will earnestly seek and look upon Christ—the very One whom they pierced and hung upon the cross. When Christ first came, He came as the Lamb, but Israel did not recognize Him and pierced Him instead. When Christ comes again, they will finally recognize that He is the One they pierced; and they will mourn and grieve deeply. The prophet Zechariah describes in great detail how the inhabitants of Jerusalem will weep and repent—family by family, in personal sorrow and contrition. It is through this national repentance of Israel that Zechariah 13:1 will be fulfilled—when Christ opens a fountain to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

If we go a step further and ask, When will the people of Israel recognize that Christ is the One they pierced, leading to this collective repentance?—we must look back

to Zechariah 12:8–9. There it says that before the house of Jacob repents, the nations will come to attack Jerusalem, and God Himself will arise to defend it. The details of this battle between the nations and Jerusalem are recorded in Zechariah chapters 13 and 14, where Zechariah 13:8–9 reveals that two-thirds of the Israelites will be cut off, while one-third will be refined, as silver and gold are refined.

Zechariah 14:3–5 says: “Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You.” This passage clearly describes that when Israel is in great danger, Christ will rend the heavens and descend, standing on the Mount of Olives. This perfectly corresponds with what was said when Jesus ascended to heaven.

In Acts 1:11, as Jesus ascended and the disciples looked up at Him, the angels said: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, and likewise, He will return and descend from heaven to the Mount of Olives. At that moment, the mountain will split in two, creating a valley through which the remaining Israelites will flee for refuge. It is then that the people of Israel will finally recognize that this Messiah is the very Christ whom they pierced. At that time, the whole house of Israel will repent and be saved.

The saints of the New Testament are those who believe by faith, not by sight; therefore, they are the descendants of Abraham by faith, heavenly in nature, like the stars of heaven. When Christ returns, they will be raptured, becoming God’s heavenly people. But the remnant of Israel, who survive through tribulation and are delivered in that day, will come to recognize their Savior, Christ, through what they

see—not by faith. They are the physical descendants of Abraham, earthly in nature, like the sand of the sea, and they will become God’s earthly people.

Next, we read the latter half of the verse: “This is My covenant with them.” Here, God is renewing His covenant with Israel. Paul is referencing Jeremiah 31:31–34, which says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

God declares that He will make a new covenant with the people of Israel, one that will replace the covenant made through Moses—the covenant of the Law. Under the Mosaic Law, God gave Israel commandments written externally, on tablets of stone. But under the new testament, God will place His law within them, writing it on their hearts. Therefore, they will no longer need to be taught by others, for from the least to the greatest, all will know the Lord personally. At that time, God will forgive their iniquities and no longer remember their sins.

Verse 28: “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”

Paul then brings us back to the present time, when Israel still does not believe and has become an enemy of the gospel. During Paul’s three missionary journeys, whenever he entered a new city, he would first go to the Jewish synagogue, hoping to gain some of his kinsmen according to the flesh. But they were enemies of the gospel—not only refusing to believe but also persecuting Paul and his co-workers. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul gradually came to understand that Israel’s

enmity toward the gospel was for the sake of the Gentiles. Because of their unbelief, the gospel turned to the Gentiles. Yet, even though they do not believe, they are not the same as the unbelieving nations. For regarding election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gave promises to them, and made covenants with them. These promises and covenants were to be extended to their descendants. For example, in Genesis 17, when God made the covenant of circumcision with Abraham, He promised (Genesis 17:6–8): “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

God chose the patriarchs and made covenantal promises to their descendants, pledging to be their God. Therefore, even though Israel repeatedly turned away from God, He has not abandoned them. Because of the fathers, God continues to love Israel and will not reject them. Thus, as Paul strongly declares in Romans 11:1, “God has not cast away His people.” Israel still holds a very special place in God’s heart.

Verse 29: “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. The Chinese Union Version translates the word as “calling,” while the KJV also uses “calling.” In other places, this same word is translated as “call” or “to be called.” Therefore, what this verse means is that God’s gifts and His calling are without repentance—He does not take them back. When God gives grace, He does not withdraw it; only man refuses to accept it. When God calls, He does not retract His call; only man refuses to respond. Thus, the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.

However, on the other hand, we must recognize that although God does not change His mind, grace and calling have a time limit. For the Gentiles, during the age of grace, anyone who believes in the salvation of Jesus Christ can receive God's gift and respond to His calling. This age of grace will continue until Christ returns. At that time, the door of grace will be closed. According to Revelation 14:6, at that time an angel will proclaim the everlasting gospel to those who dwell on the earth. That is not the gospel of life, for there will be no indwelling of the Holy Spirit; rather, it is a message preparing the Gentiles who remain at that time to enter the kingdom of God as citizens.

As for Israel, they are beloved. When Christ returns, all Israel will be saved, yet during this process, two-thirds of Israel will perish because of unbelief. Thank the Lord that we are still in the age of grace! May we grasp the time while the door of grace is still open—to preach the gospel, to bring people to salvation, and to learn to serve together in the church, which is the commission God has entrusted to us. May we seize every opportunity to fulfill our part.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, We confess that concerning the messages about the end of the age, we do not fully understand, and our knowledge may be incomplete. But one thing we are certain of: during this age of grace, as long as we believe in the salvation of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. We are gathered together as the church—the new covenant people of God—to bear testimony for You. You have entrusted us with the mission to help those around us come to know the gospel, to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and to gather with us as Your new testament people, the church. Help us to offer ourselves according to what we have come to know and to take up the commission You have given us. We believe that Your gifts and Your calling are irrevocable. Since we have received Your grace and answered Your call, may we walk on the path of sanctification. Help us to bear proper testimony for You in our church. Bless the church where I belong. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!