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“What does “All Israel will be saved’ Mean?”

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With

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What Does “All Israel will be saved” Mean?

It's common among Christians to interpret Paul's statement that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26) to refer to mean that national Israel will be saved by God in the end or that all Jews will eventually turn to the messiah in the end times. But is that what Paul meant? How would we know? This episode discusses Paul's statement and these questions.

Links referenced:

[Summary of Christopher Zoccali, “And So All Israel Will be Saved: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship,” Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 2008: 289-317](#)

[Staples' article: Jason A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with “All Israel”? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25–27,” Journal of Biblical Literature 130:2 \(2011\): 371-390](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 102, What Does “All Israel will be saved” Mean? I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, this is our second show of our two eschatology series so I’m looking forward to it.

MSH: Back to eschatology. Today we’re going to talk about, as you can tell from the title, Romans 11: 25-26, this line that Paul has in there about all Israel will be saved. Now this is a phrase that a lot of commentators, I would say really any honest commentator, has sort of found impervious to clarity, impenetrable in terms of being certain about what Paul is saying here. That I think it’s fair to say, has changed a little bit but certainly we’re not at the point currently where anyone can sort of claim it must be this and it can’t be any of these other options. There’s actually four interpretations and I’m going to start with this, four kind of approaches, four views to what this phrase might actually mean. For listeners on the page to the episode, this particular episode, there is going to be a link to a summary, it’s not the actual article, but a link to a summary of the article by a fellow whose last name is Zoccali, and his article is called, And So All Israel Will Be Saved: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11:26 in Pauline Scholarship.

That was published in 2008 in the Journal for the Study of the New Testament. It’s a really nice overview of the options that scholars have presented. There will be a link to a summary of the article that gives you the numbered interpretations so you can just be acquainted with that material. And then later, there’s going to be another article I’ll reference, and I’ll wait until I get there, where that actually exists online and is accessible to listeners and they’ll get that. I’ll mention that when I get there. For right now, there are four sort of mainstream views as to what Paul meant by this phrase. Let me just give you from Zoccali, this is his terminology. One would be what he calls the ecclesiastical interpretation and that’s the view that equates Israel in the phrase, so all Israel will be saved. It equates, a one-to-one equation, Israel with the church. So this view resists defining Israel ethnically in any way as Jews and it’s based largely on Paul’s apparent redefinition of Israel in Romans 9:6 where Paul says,

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

MSH: So there are a lot of people who will seize upon that verse and say when Paul talks about Israel, it has nothing to do with ethnicity at all. He only, and these are key words here, he only is thinking about the church, anyone who believes. Now that view would be sort of common with sort of the current controversy about the church replacing Israel and the political ramifications of that. So that view about the church displaces or replaces Israel as the people of God, this is where they would be at, Israel, there’s no such thing as Israel in God’s program anymore. It’s just all the church. It’s exclusively the church. It’s all the church. I’m saying it that way deliberately because of what’s going to follow. That view, believe it or not, despite the talk about replacement theology, has I think it’s fair to say sort of fallen out of favor because many think it’s too categorical today. In other words, a lot of scholars think it goes too far in excluding ethnicity at all because if you are this view, it’s very easy to argue things like Israel and Jews ethnically are basically non-elect.

People will actually say things like they’re Christ-killers. They’re non-elect. God has set them aside. God doesn’t care about them anymore. So this view, the ecclesiastical interpretation,

will be used to prop up those kinds of statements and those kinds of ideas. This is a common view but I think it's fair to say, and Zoccali mention's this, that it's sort of fallen out of favor because it's just too categorical. Take that for what it's worth where we're at, at least in this episode. The second view, first is the ecclesiastical interpretation, the second view would be what Zoccali refers to as the total national elect view. This view argues that the complete number of elect from historical or ethnic Israel, this is the way Zoccali word's it, a complete number of elect from historical Israel, from ethnic Israel, will be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, in other words, through Christ.

Now what this does is it sort of takes attention away from the identity of the elect, the identity of Israel in Paul's statement and kind of changes the discussion to how and why these elect will be saved, and of course the answer to that is through Jesus. It sort of changes the questioner, it changes the focus a little bit. Third view is what Zoccali refers to as the two covenant view. This is a minority view. I think very arguably the smallest number of scholars would be in this camp and I think you'll see why once I explain what it is. The two covenant view says that every Jew will be saved by membership in the Jewish covenant. In other words, the fact that they're Jews and God made a covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, those people are just saved because of who they are. Every Jew will be saved by membership in the Jewish covenant regardless of whether they embrace the Gospel of Christ or not. They're in because they're Jews and God chose them, end of story. That defines the Old Testament covenant election as salvation.

That's what that does. There are significant problems with that because apostasy, we've talked about these things in the podcast before. That's just what this view would say. It would add that Jews who do respond to the Gospel are also saved but they're saved because of Jesus then. You say that's kind of odd because if you needed and they'll say nope, a Jew didn't need Jesus. A Jew would've been saved because they're a Jew. But if they do believe in Jesus, that's good, too. They're going to get to heaven either way. This view I think you can tell, the smallest number of people articulate this and defend it. It doesn't seem really coherent at all with statements that Paul makes, Romans 9:1-5, Romans 11 and other epistles, Galatians, what not. Paul doesn't really define salvation as the fact that you're a Jew. He was a Jew and he said he needed Christ. He would not have been part of the people of God without Christ. You can't reject the Messiah. So Paul doesn't put any certainty and he doesn't take any comfort in the fact that he was a Jew.

He's pointing people to the need including pointing Jews to the need of Christ. So this is really kind of a fringe minority view. Fourth view is what's called by Zoccali the eschatological miracle view. This is the idea of a future salvation of all Jews either at the second coming or immediately prior to the second coming, after what Paul talks about in Romans 11, this is verse 25. We're talking about Romans 11:26, all Israel will be saved. The verse right before it talks about the fullness of the Gentiles coming in. So this view says after the fullness of Gentiles is come in, whatever that means. That's either all of the Gentiles predestined to be saved get saved or more of ambiguously the mission to the Gentiles as God declares it's over. So whenever the fullest of the Gentiles, whenever that is, happens then all the Jews alive at that time will be saved through a mass conversion to Christ. Now this or some form of it, this general idea is, I think it's fair to say, a very dominant view within evangelicalism and popular end times teaching that we need to, and whether it gets political or not, but we need to look at Israel still as the apple of God's eye and we can never say anything against Israel because God has a plan for them.

And this plan is that all the Jews are going to return to Israel, return to Jerusalem as we move into the end times. This is going to happen because they're going to be protected from the antichrist there. And when the Lord comes back, they're all going to look on him whom they have pierced and all Israel is going to be saved. They're going to have this massive conversion because who could deny, there he is up in the sky. So this is a very very dominant view within the popular end times perspective, end times teaching. So those are your four views. Just to recap them quickly, ecclesiastical interpretation, Israel is the church; total national elect view, trying to shift from who the elect are to how they become elect and that's Jew or Gentile, both have to be saved through Christ; two covenant view, if you're a Jew you're in and if you're not then you need Christ, and if you're Jew who believes in Christ, two thumbs up to you anyway; and then there's this eschatological miracle idea that they're going to be converted at the second coming, either at it or shortly before.

Now where I want to focus on is, believe it or not, I'm going to ask questions like does the Old Testament have any relevance here? If you want a recent discussion of Romans 11:25-26 that I find that sort of mirrors what I've been thinking from sources like Pitre that we discussed last week and re-examining some of the eschatological content and concepts in light of the Second Temple period. There's an article by Jason Staples that is accessible through to the Internet. It's a PDF. You get the whole article and it was published in the Journal of Biblical Literature in 2011. It's one of the premier biblical studies journals. So what he tries to do is kind of take a fresh look at defining what Paul meant by all Israel. And he is going to go back into Second Temple literature and he is going to go back into the Old Testament to try to figure out what Paul was thinking when he used this phrase. So what Staples says, just in broad strokes here, is that to answer this question of what Paul was thinking, you really have to address three questions. There's three sort of really important interpretive questions. One is how does Paul define all Israel? That would be the most obvious one because that's probably going to tell us what he was thinking, how he was thinking about it.

Two, what does Paul mean by the fullness of the nations, the fullness of the Gentiles? What is going on with that? Third, how was the salvation of "all Israel", how is it related to the fullness of the Gentiles? What's the relationship between two? So those three things work together but Staples is saying if we can grok these things, we're going to be able to figure out, maybe not with complete certainty, but a reasonable degree of certainty what would Paul was angling for here. So in short, the essential thing to solve is what is the ingathering of the Gentiles have to do with the salvation of all Israel, if you want to just put it in a sentence because of Romans 11:25-26 discusses both ideas in relationship to each other. You can't just talk about all Israel being saved without talking about the fullness of the Gentiles. We can't talk about fullness of the Gentiles without talking about this all Israel thing. So in a sentence, here's the question. What does the ingathering, the regathering of the fullness of the Gentiles into the family of God, what does that have to do with the salvation of "all Israel"?

So let's take them in order. For those who want the article, you can go up and get lots more detail but I'm going to try to distill some of what Staples has said and add my own thoughts, my own perspectives. But that's a good resource for tracking the major ideas anyway. So let's talk about all Israel. We have to determine what that phrase means, and before we do, we have to actually talk about Israel. What is Paul thinking just with the word Israel or Israelites? Is Israel synonymous with an "ethnic" Jew or a state of ethnic Jews, a community of ethnic Jews? What is Israel? Is Paul thinking in ethnic terms when he uses the word Israel? You

have a limited number of options here. You can say the word Israel and a word like Jews are totally synonymous, one means the other. They are completely overlapping. So if that was true then the phrase all Israel would mean every ethnic Jew. We talked about the viewpoints and certainly the last one about when the Messiah returns, every Jew alive is going to be converted, and that's what all Israel means. That view, very dominant within popular prophecy teaching, they're going to look at all Israel and say that means Jews, ethnic Jews. That's how we define Israel. It's an ethnic term. All Israel means every ethnic Jew. Another option is you could say maybe a word like Jews is actually a subset of Israel, in other words, all Jews were Israelites but not all Israelites were Jew's.

How does that work? You would go to passages like Romans 9, which we read earlier, Romans 9:25-26, Galatians 3, if you are Christ's you are Abraham's seed. He's writing to the Galatians who were Gentiles, the whole chapter of Galatians 3, redefining children of Abraham to include the Gentiles. So if that's what Paul's thinking is about Israel when he writes the word Israel, he's thinking when I write the word Israel I'm not thinking of only ethnic Jews. I'm thinking of the people who are Israelites spiritually. In other words, they have the faith of Abraham like I wrote to the Galatians way back when in Galatians 3. So those are your basic options. Israel means every ethnic Jew or all Israel every ethnic Jew. But Israel might mean everybody who believes, including Jews but not exclusively ethnic Jews. The door is open wider there. Now that doesn't necessarily help with the ultimate question that we're angling for here because we're just going through the options now. But the interesting thing about this is that you can take both options. Which is it? Does Israel mean ethnic Jew or does it mean something else that might include ethnic Jews but include other people, too? Which is it?

Historically, you can go back into Second Temple Jewish sources and ask the same question. When Jews of Jesus' day, when Jews of Paul's day and before, earlier than them, without a New Testament, without the Messiah having come yet, without Paul ever even being born, how were Jews in the Second Temple period when they wrote about Israel, when they use the word Israel or Israelites or Jew, how did they think about the terms? Staples and other scholars have done this and it's actually kind of interesting. Israel in Second Temple Jewish literature, and I might add even in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, is what scholars would call polyvalent. In other words, it means lots of different things. Israel doesn't always mean the same thing. It can mean a number of different things. For instance, Israel can refer to either in the Hebrew Bible or Second Temple literature, it can refer to the patriarch Jacob because his name was changed to Israel so it's one guy. It can refer to the nation which was composed of Jacob's descendants, in other words, all 12 tribes of Israel including the Northern bunch, the Northern 10, the Southern 2, the nation after we have Solomon dying and the monarchy divides and all that stuff.

Israel can be used to refer to the 10 tribes that get called the nation of Israel after the monarchy divides or it can actually be used of all 12 tribes. They can be called Israel, too. Third thing, kind of obvious from what I just said. Sometimes the word Israel is limited in context to just the 10 tribes but usually you'll get some sort of helper word with that like house of Israel or house of Judah juxtaposed next to each other, so Israel here just means the ten. It doesn't include the two. Sometimes it's more restricted. You also can get returnees from Judah after the Babylonian exile referred to as Israel. Israel just in and of itself can mean a number of different things. It's a little bit different though when it comes to Jew. Jew seems to be, judging by the Second Temple material and even the Old Testament, the word Jew seems to be an outsider

term, in other words, a term coined by non-Jews, basically the people the Babylonians captured the remaining Kingdom of Judah. Jew seems to be a term given to the captives while they were in exile that is linked to geography. They were from Judea today, so if you're from that place, the term Jew is coined to describe who you were. Who among all of the captive peoples that we have? You're those guys. You're Jews from Judea, from this place. So Jew actually is an outsider term. If you look it up in the Old Testament, it's kind of interesting. Every place where you're going to have Jew referred to, you're going to have some sort of context that's exilic. The term is not used before the exile to describe pre-exilic Israelites. It is very interesting. So we have *yehudim* in the plural, for instance. Whenever you see that, there's going to be some sort of flavor of the exile. Here are the instances. I didn't list them all out by number but I can give you all the chapters. 2 Kings 25:25, this is set in the time of Gedaliah,

²⁵ But in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck down Gedaliah and put him to death along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah.

MSH: This is the time of the exile, Gedaliah. So that's the kind of thing you get. This is a term that would've existed in the exilic context. 2 Kings 25:25 you get *yehudim* or in its similar form used throughout Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. All of those books are exilic or post-exilic. You also get it in Jeremiah 34:9. Jeremiah 34:9,

⁹ that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother.

MSH: There's the word Jew. Jeremiah 34, Jeremiah's living during or just prior to the third wave of the exile. Remember the exile of Judah happened in three stages, 605, 597, 586 when the Temple was destroyed. It's an exilic context. You also get the term Jew used in Daniel, early date of Daniel puts that as a book written in the exile, late date of Daniel has it written after the exile. And lastly, Zechariah 8:23, it's the same situation. Zechariah is a book that is dealing with exilic or post-exilic context. So it's really curious that Jew is just a much tighter thing, just a reference to the captives from the southern kingdom who were captive in Babylon and returned. They're the Jews as opposed to Israelites, which is much broader even though in certain contexts, that term itself can be restrictive as well. If you go into non-Biblical literature, let's take Josephus. This is in Antiquities of the Jews. This is just one example but Josephus is actually very careful about his use of the term *ioudaios*, Jew or Judean. In Josephus's usage, it refers to a person descended from the southern kingdom of Judah, the kingdom that was taken into exile in Babylon. That kingdom, those two tribes, is only a subset of the larger historical entity called Israel. So this one passage in Josephus says this,

“From the day they went up from Babylon, they were called by that name, in Greek *hoi Ioudaioi*, the Jews, after the tribe of Judah, which was prominent coming to those places both the people themselves and the land received that name.”

MSH: This is a pretty clear historical testimony by Josephus, who ought to know what he's talking about when it comes to the Jews, says this is what this term meant. It was a term given to the people from the tribe of Judah and the place of Judea that was taken captive into Babylon. So the term was necessarily limited to the descendants of the people who came from the exiled southern kingdom. And it's an outsider term given to these people by their captor's. Now I'm going to quote a little bit from an article that I don't have a link for. It's an article by John Elliot from the Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus talking about this issue, this terminology. He says,

“Jesus and his earliest followers, evidence demonstrates, were called ‘Israelites’, ‘Galileans’ or ‘Nazoreans’ by their fellow Israelites. ‘Israel’, ‘Israelites’ were the preferred terms of self-designation among members of the house of Israel when addressing other members—not ‘Ἰουδαίος’, ‘Jew’ or ‘Judaism’. Modern interpreters and translators of the Bible, it is argued, should respect and follow this insider preference. ‘Ἰουδαίος’, an outsider coinage, is best rendered ‘Judaean’, not ‘Jew’, to reflect the explicit or implied connection with Judaea. It was employed by Israelites when addressing outsiders as an accommodation to outsider usage. The concepts ‘Jew’, ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ *as understood today* are shaped more by fourth century rather than first-century AD. The concept of Jew as understood today derives not from the first century but from the fourth and following centuries. It denotes persons shaped by and oriented to not only Torah and Tanakh, but Mishnah, Midrashim, and Talmudim.”

MSH: That's the end of Eliot's quote. It just gives you a reinforcement for what the earlier source was saying. This was Jews refer to each other one way, they refer to each other in the presence of foreigners another way, and then the term Jew was outsider lingo. In the lexicon entry on *ioudaios*, in BDAG, the premier Greek lexicon for Biblical studies, the editor Frederick Danker laments that

“incalculable harm has been caused by simply glossing *ioudaios* with Jew. For many, readers or auditors of the Bible translations do not practice the historical judgment necessary to distinguish between circumstances and events of an ancient time and contemporary ethnic religious social realities with the result that anti-Judaism in the modern sense of the term is needlessly fostered through or by means of biblical texts.”

MSH: So Danker's actually saying the fact that we've been careless in the way we throw the term Jew around has actually contributed to anti-Semitism among the Biblical scholars and the religious community. So I threw that in to basically say this isn't just an item of trivia. It actually has implications that has been known to scholars for some time. Now let's look at the phrase, all Israel. So we've talked about the phrase Israel or Israelite. We've talked about the word Jew. One is fairly elastic. Jew is much less so and an outsider term. All Israel as a phrase, believe it or not, occurs 153 times in the Bible, only once in the New Testament, and in that once is our phrase from Paul, all Israel will be saved. That means that the other ones are in the Old Testament so we might want to think about all Israel the way it is used in the Old Testament.

And since Paul knew his Old Testament, maybe Paul sort of did that, too. So all Israel relates basically generally to the tribal structure of the descendants of Jacob, what we would call the nation of Israel. So when all Israel is used a phrase, it's really referring to the collective community of the 12 tribes. Staples adds "it consistently refers to the 12 tribes of Jewish literature of the Second Temple." So the Second Temple writers are using it like the Old Testament does, this sense of all 12 tribes and community. So in a technical sense, Israel necessarily includes Jews, the ones from the southern kingdom, but is not limited to only ethnicity. When you add the word all in front of it, all Israel, then you're really narrowing it down to the 12 tribal structure. Another way of putting that is that the word Israel, catch this, since Israel by its lonesome can mean four or five different things we just talked about, including figures that are not attached to ethnic origin, Israel therefore speaks of covenantal inclusion, the covenantal idea.

You're in the people of God. It doesn't necessarily speak of ethnicity. When you have all Israel, that's when you really get into the 12 Tribes structure. So since Jew is consistently used to describe an ethnic group by foreigners and Israel is not used that way, the terms are not synonymous. They are not one-to-one overlapping. So the first view that we talked about, that Israel just means ethnic Jew, it's a one-to-one equation. That is not the case. So we can actually rule out the ecclesiastical interpretation, which is the one that lots of people who advocate strict replacement theology, that's what they want to argue, that when Paul says all Israel will be saved, he's talking about the Church. The Jews, they're no longer the people of God. They're set aside, cast aside, thrown away. They're garbage, all this kind of stuff. God doesn't have a destiny for them anymore. That's extreme. That just says too much. It overstates the data. And to repeat it, since Jew is the term used to describe ethnicity and Israel is not strictly so used that way, therefore the terms cannot be viewed as completely synonymous. That's an important thought. Now Staples writes,

"Obviously the key question is whether first-century Jews (Paul in particular) continued to make this distinction. The evidence points to an answer in the affirmative. Josephus certainly upholds the distinction, using the terms Ἰσραηλίτης and Ἰσραήλος only in the first eleven books of the *Antiquities*—books dealing with the pre-exilic and exilic periods—and nowhere else in the Josephan corpus. Ἰουδαῖος, on the other hand, occurs 1,190 times."

in the Josephan corpus—but only twenty- seven times in the first ten books of the *Antiquities*. Once the northern tribes are off the scene, Josephus restricts himself to more precise terminology referring only to the southern tribes—he no longer speaks of "Israel," but only "the Jews."

MSH: When he has the southern tribes in view, the physical descendants that come back from the exile, he doesn't refer to them as Israel. He refers to them as Jews.

"But when all twelve tribes are in play, Josephus clearly prefers the more comprehensive term "Israel." The Qumran community maintains similar distinctions. As E. P. Sanders has observed, it is noteworthy that the sect "generally refrained from simply calling [itself] 'Israel.'" Indeed, "the

members seem to have been conscious of their status as sectarians, chosen from out of Israel, and as being *a forerunner of the true Israel*, which God would establish to fight the decisive war,” identifying themselves as a faithful subset within Israel (e.g., “the remnant of Israel,” “captives of Israel,” “house in Israel,” and “repentant of Israel”). They likewise avoid calling themselves “Judah” or “Judahites”, instead preferring precise tribal distinctions— Judah, Levi, and Benjamin.

MSH: So you get Josephus, you get the Dead Sea Scrolls stuff, stuff from Qumran. These other sources are actually being very careful with the way they use the term Israel and the way they use the term Jew. And since they are not, here’s the major point. Since Israel and Jew, those two terms, are not used the same ways of the same things, they cannot be completely synonymous. So anyone who says they are and wants to make a theological or political point out of that is just wrong. The basis of the claim is flawed so they are not completely overlapping. Now let's talk about some implications and go back to Paul here. Israel, and especially all Israel, refers to the covenant tribes of God, the 12 tribes. But the term Israel and the phrase all Israel can't be said to refer to exclusively ethnic Jews. If you're thinking of ethnic Jews, if you were Paul and you're thinking about writing to the Romans here and I'm talking about end times and I'm talking about their future destiny, and I want to make sure that they know that I'm writing about ethnic Jews, Paul would've used the term, *ioudaios*. He does not. He uses Israel.

All Israel will be saved. He doesn't say all *ioudaios* will be saved, two different things. So when Paul speaks of all Israel, which in the Old Testament points to the covenant tribes, he is speaking not necessarily of ethnic Jews but of the totality of God's covenant people. Let me read that again. When Paul speaks of all Israel, which in the Old Testament points to the covenant tribes, he is speaking not necessarily of ethnic Jews but of the totality of God's covenant people. In other words, when Paul uses the term Israel or thinks of Israel, he isn't excluding ethnic Jews but he's also not thinking the only of ethnic Jews, rather he is thinking about the total covenant people of God. You know that means?

Here’s the implication. It means that when Paul talks about Israel and all Israel, he's talking about a theological construct, not an ethnic construct. And that is really important. Israel for Paul is not an ethnic term. It's a theological term. Why, because it is tied to the covenant people concept in the Old Testament and Paul's reading of this is not unique. It's consistent with the Second Temple literature. All Israel does not point to all ethnic Jews. Let's jump on this and draw conclusions equating Israel and the church. Why not Mike? It sounds like the ecclesiastical interpretation. It's just the church now. No, it's the church, yes, but it doesn't exclude Jews like a lot of replacement theologians want to have it. And the last view, the eschatological miracle view that really wants Israel to mean ethnic Jews because all the ethnic Jews are miraculously saved. That doesn't wash either because if that's what Paul was intending, he would've used a different term. So we have some nits to pick with replacement theology and the basis for what they say and your more popular evangelical kind of miracle conversion view. There's problems there, too.

This is typically the way it is with eschatology. A system will latch onto an idea and I hate to put it this way but never actually go back to the primary text and check if their idea derives from the primary sources or not. What that leads to in the replacement view, they overstate the case and it actually produces antipathy toward Jews ethnically or politically. And on the other

side, it misreads the text. Paul's not talking about ethnic Jews in Romans 11:25-26. So these are important implications of what's going on here. We have to let the primary sources guide our thinking. Now this brings us to a question. If we say that Israel is a theological construct and not simply an ethnic one, let's zero in on this phrase, all Israel. If Paul is doing theology there and he's not doing ethnicity there, the question is did Paul ever specifically divorce this idea from Jewish ethnicity so as to include Gentiles? In other words, Paul's using Israel as a theological construct that really means the people of God, believers. Now the replacement theologians want you to conclude from that that Paul is writing off the Jews.

We should write off the Jews. They don't have any destiny and God doesn't like them anymore and he's turned his back on them so we shouldn't worry about how we treat them and all this kind of stuff. It's all fulfilled in Jesus and the Jews killed Jesus and the Jews are just awful. It breeds this anti-Semitic flavor to it. That's where replacement theology, it doesn't have to lead there but often does, this overly antagonistic view. So Paul's building this theological construct. When he's doing that, is that proof that he's including Gentiles? The flipside of the coin is does Paul therefore deliberately excluded ethnic Jews? Is Paul anti-Jewish? What we've read to this point I think the answer should be clear. Paul does since it is a theological construct, since Israel is a theological construct and not an ethnic construct. Yeah, in Paul's mind, Israel included Gentiles.

I'm going to take you into a few passages to show you that. At the same time, while Gentiles are being brought in, Paul is not expressing antipathy toward his countrymen and so we shouldn't. He is not writing them off as though they have no destiny in God's mind anymore in the flow of the eschatological history. God has not washed his hands of them. The door is wide open within the theological construct of the people of God for ethnic Jews. Paul isn't making an excluding statement. He's creating a construct that is inclusive of Gentiles. I've already mentioned Romans 9. I'm just going to read a couple of passages but then I'm going to get to one that's going to surprise you. Romans 9:6-8, this one's probably familiar. Paul writes,

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

MSH: This is a very clear statement that the children of Abraham includes Gentiles. It's very clear. I don't know what else Paul could say to make it clearer. Maybe Galatians 3, that's what we'll read next. Paul writes beginning in verse 7,

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

MSH: That's the end of Galatians 3. These are explicit clear statements. So let's put Paul and his terminology in the Old Testament. Does this work? What we just read in Romans 3 and Galatians 3, is Paul inventing something or does the Old Testament foreshadow Paul's thinking? Does the Old Testament even explicitly justify Paul's thinking? What is Paul thinking? Paul's thinking that since we have Jesus, all Israel will be saved, in other words, all the people of God. This is a theological construct. Israel is no longer an ethnic construct. It is a theological construct that includes Gentiles. Paul, that's just so innovative. That's just so radical. Is it really? The people of God, think about it. Just go back to the Old Testament in your mind, especially if you've read Unseen Realm, the whole Divine Council theology and how I talked about Old Testament salvation. Who are the people of God in the Old Testament? They are those who have aligned themselves with Yahweh as the God of gods by faith, in other words, they're believing loyalty is assigned to Yahweh and no one else.

In the Old Testament, the people who did that, by and large, overwhelmingly were from the 12 ethnic tribes of Israel but there were Gentiles who made that decision, too, weren't there? Rahab, Naaman, you get instances where Gentiles confess that Yahweh is the God of gods and they mean it. They're serious about it. In the New Testament, who are the people of God? It's the same answer. All those who have aligned themselves in believing loyalty to Yahweh, incarnate now in Jesus Christ. Whether you're Jew or Gentile you can do that. This salvation is tied to the New Covenant, the indwelling of the Spirit in all who believe. The book of Acts which we went through over many weeks, very clear to point out the Gentiles experienced the coming of the Spirit in exactly the same way that the Jews did. This is all deliberate. This is deliberate messaging. Let's go to some text that I think might surprise you, what Paul is thinking to nail this down, that for Paul, all Israel is not about all ethnic Jews. It's not about the land of the Jews. It is a theological construct that's about anyone who will align themselves with the God of Israel incarnate in Jesus Christ, Jew or Gentile. Jeremiah 30:3 says,

³ For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."

MSH: Both Israel, the 10 tribes, and Judah, the 2 tribes, are called by God my people. That's noteworthy because in Hosea, Hosea was the one writing before the Northern Kingdom went kaput. Remember Hosea 1:9 when Hosea looks at Israel and their apostate as can be and he knows the Assyrians are going to wipe them out, the Assyrians are going to be God's hand for this? He looks at Israel, the 10 tribes of the north and says *lo ammi*, not my people? Hosea 1:9, I'll just read it to you.

⁹ And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

MSH: The 10 tribes are just done. Look at Paul. Look how Paul uses this phrase and its idea when he quotes Hosea in Romans 9:25-26. We've read Romans 9:25-26 twice already. What I didn't tell you is that Paul quotes the book of Hosea in what he says. Now listen to what Paul says. Here's Romans 9:22,

²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

MSH: You think about that. What is Paul doing? I'll tell you what he's doing. He's swapping in the Gentiles to replace the 10 lost Tribes. Those who were not my people, who are not my people in the Old Testament? Gentiles weren't the people of God, and we know that the 10 lost tribes aren't either because he said in Hosea, not my people. Paul includes the Gentile in the restoration of the theological construct known as the people of God, all Israel, because he reads that theology in the Old Testament. He's reading that in Hosea. Go back to Romans 11, this is where we started.

⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved,

MSH: What he's doing is a partial hardening upon Israel, that's because God did that because God wanted the fullness of the Gentiles to come in. And in this way, once the Gentiles come in, all Israel will be saved. Remember, all the other instances of the phrase all Israel are found in the Old Testament and they referred to the 12 tribes. Paul is reading his Old Testament. He's reading all Israel as a theological construct that includes Gentiles in the 12 tribe idea. He's getting his theology from the Old Testament, and it's not about ethnic Jews. It is inherently inclusive of Gentiles, which means in our parlance, post-cross, that what he's talking about here are believers in general, and you can say that's the church. Go ahead, you can say it because the church is circumcision neutral. But look at Paul's wording. It's a partial hardening on Israel and Israel itself doesn't exclude ethnic Jews. It includes Gentiles so you can read this and say what Paul is talking about is believers anywhere, not just ethnic Jews. That's correct.

That's what Paul means. But what he doesn't mean is just as important. He is not going the extra mile to throw the Jews under the bus. He's not doing that so we have to be careful not to over read what Paul is saying but also not misread what Paul is saying. So the ramifications for our purposes as we wrap up here is that Paul's talk, his lingo here is certainly eschatological but these prophecies do not have 1948 or any physical regathering of national Israel in view. Rather, for Paul, the Israel he's thinking about is a theological construct, the totality of the people of God whoever they might be. He's not thinking of ethnic Jews or a national geographic location associated with a particular ethnic group. So pop eschatology has some sins to atone for here but so does replacement theology because of the way it over exaggerates the data maybe because of an anti-Semitic streak in it. I'm not saying that anyone who's a replacement theology is anti-Semitic. That would itself be an overstatement. I am not saying that. I am saying that that vehicle has gone down that road too often. Once is too often. The error is marginalizing political Israel to the point of anti-Semitism but it's also on the reverse side of the coin looking at ethnic Israel as some sanctified thing, ethnic national Israel. This is not what Paul's talking about. Paul's talking about a theological construct, the totality of the people of God and the Jews are not excluded from that but the Gentiles, in Paul's reading of the Old Testament, are included in all Israel.