



FUTURE SALVATION OF THE HISTORICAL ISRAEL AT THE PAROUSIA: INTERPRETATION OF ROM 11:25–32¹

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Abstract:

The passage (Rom 11:25–32) by which Paul closes his discussion about the issue of Israel presents a lot of problems for any interpreter. It contains many ambiguous words and even more possibilities for their interpretations. One of the most prevailing interpretation of this passage among the contemporary scholars is the “future salvation of historical Israel at the parousia” also called “eschatological miracle”, supported by scholars such as James G. D. Dunn (1939 – 2020) or Ernst Käsemann (1906 – 1998). The aim of this paper is to survey the text of this passage to see where the possibilities for different interpretations are, briefly present some of them and then at the end present the important remarks of Beyond the New perspective on Paul and their contribution toward this passage.

Key words:

“All Israel”, Restoration, Hardening, Deliverer, Covenant

1 Introduction

One of the difficult problems that the early Christians had to cope with was the question of Israel. Her restoration was part of the vision in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, but he was executed at the initiative of the Jewish authorities and his status as the awaited Messiah that came to form the identity of the Christian movement remained a minority opinion within Judaism. This naturally provoked questions about the meaning of such situation. What does the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the majority of the Jews reveal about the intentions of God? Are the Jews persisting in their rejection of Jesus still part of God’s plan? Apostle Paul, a former persecutor of the followers of Jesus, dealt with these questions extensively in chapters 9–11 of his Epistle to Rome. Paul was convinced that God did not abandon Israel (Rom 11:1). He hardened her, in order that the Gentiles could come in, and in the end, all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26a). The passage Rom 11:25–32 can be taken as a climax of his argument on this issue, presenting Paul’s vision of the restoration of Israel.

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At the same time this short passage is full of ambiguities and lends itself to multiple interpretations. The first part of this paper attempts to interpret Rom 11:25–32 with the emphasis on the future salvation of the historical Israel at the *parousia*. Due to the many ambiguities in the text there is no full agreement between scholars about a variety of details. Therefore, the second part of the paper presents a brief overview of opinions and suggestions of various scholars that are held to the present time.

2 Interpretation of Rom 11:25–32 pointing to the future salvation of historical Israel at the *parousia*

This passage is the climax of a larger part of Romans (chapters 9–11), where Paul deals with the problem of Israel.² In this passage Paul presents his hope for the salvation of Israel. In the preceding passage Paul uses the image of an olive tree and of grafting and cutting off the branches (Rom 11:16–24) and follows it with a *hymn* (Rom 11:33–36). The structure of the text is simple: The disclosure of the mystery (v. 25–26a), proof from the Scripture (v. 26b–27) and its theological explanation (v. 28–32).

2.1 The Disclosure of the mystery: v. 25–26a

Paul addresses this passage to the Gentile Christians in Rome (Rom 11:13). He attaches special importance to the words he is going to say. His purpose for writing this text is to prevent the temptation of Gentile Christians in Rome to be “wise in their own conceits”, to avoid relying on their own (human) wisdom (see Rom 11: 20; Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 11:19). Paul presents “a mystery” that was revealed to him. The background for his presentation is to be sought in the Jewish apocalyptic rather than in the Graeco-Roman mystery cults.³ It involves a revelation of a divine secret by a divine agency. The basic matrix for this presentation is the salvation history and its climax, fulfilling God’s purpose for his people. Paul presents it as an eschatological mystery, a revelation concerning the events of the end of time. It concerns the Jews and the Gentiles alike, God’s purpose to include the

² This passage is a continuation and a brief summary of Paul’s thoughts developed in Rom 9–11 and therefore I do not see a reason to suspect, that the verses 25–27 could be a later interpolation, as Ch. Plag assumed. See Christoph Plag, *Israels Wege zum Heil: eine Untersuchung zu Römer 9 bis 11* (Stuttgart: Calver Verlag, 1969).

³ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word biblical commentary 38 (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 678.

Gentiles with the Jews as his people (see Rom 16:25–26), or possibly the mystery could be Christ, in whom Jews and Gentiles are united.⁴

Paul presents himself as a mediator, an apocalyptic. It is a conventional part of the apocalyptic texts that the revelation of a mystery comes in response to some kind of anguish or cry. Here the mystery provides the answer to Paul's anguishing cry expressed in Rom 9:1–3 and 10:1.⁵ What was the means by which Paul gained the insights into this mystery? Was it his spiritual interpretation of the Scripture, or the moment of his conversion, or something else? Scholars opinions differ about this.

Another problem is the translation concerning the phrase ἀπὸ μέρους. Is it a "partial hardening" or blindness that has come over Israel or "part of the people" suffer the hardening? Dunn takes the ἀπὸ μέρους adverbially with the word πῶρως rather than with the words τῷ Ἰσραὴλ and translates "partial hardening" has come over Israel. According to him Paul considers himself as a part of a single people and Israel as a unified whole.⁶ Cranfield is convinced that the phrase ἀπὸ μέρους modifies the word γέγονεν and so it refers to the fact that not all Jews were hardened and he translates "that hardening has affected part of Israel" (see Rom 11:5, 7, 17).⁷ And similarly Jewett agrees that hardening has come upon a part of Israel because in the image of the olive tree (Rom 11:16–24), only some of the branches of Israel had been cut off.⁸ Paul does not have a clear answer on the final events, their strict sequence or how final salvation of Israel is related to the coming of "the deliverer from Zion", that was mainly interpreted as *parousia* of Christ. He assures his readers that God foreknew all events. The "full number" of Gentiles is presumably an equivalent to that of Israel in Rom 11:12. The equivalence is probably not in the exact number of both groups, but rather expresses the lack of importance attributed towards their ethnic origin.⁹ But certainly the "full number" of Gentiles is something larger than Paul's planned evangelization of the pagans in Spain. Paul does not specify what he means by the "coming into". It may refer to entering "the kingdom" or "life" along the lines of Jesus' tradition or, more specifically to the metaphor

⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 678.

⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 679.

⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 679.

⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 575.

⁸ Robert Jewett, Roy D. Kotansky, and Eldon Jay Epp, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 700.

⁹ Dunn, *Romans*, 680.

of the branches that have been “grafted in”. The motif of the coming of Gentiles to Zion (see Isa 2:2–4; 25:6–8; Mic 4:1–3; Zech 8:20–23, Tob 13:13) was well-known. “Coming into” therefore could be used by Paul as transforming the traditional Jewish expectation that God’s final acceptance of the Gentiles would be a physical pilgrimage of Gentiles to Jerusalem.¹⁰ Paul was convinced that the conversion of the Gentiles, or maybe better word for it would be their turning to the one God, will provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom 10:19; 11:11.14).

Paul says that in that manner all Israel shall be saved. The phrase καὶ οὕτως can have modal but also temporal meaning. And who is “all Israel”? Käsemann claims that “all Israel” is a fixed Jewish formula that designates the people „which establishes the individuality of its members [...] as a fellowship of the elect.”¹¹ “All Israel” then means most likely Israel as a whole, but not necessarily every individual member.¹² Cranfield presents four main interpretations of the phrase “all Israel”: 1) all the elect of Jews and Gentiles; 2) all the elect belonging to the nation of Israel; 3) the whole nation Israel, including every member; 4) the whole nation Israel, but not necessarily every individual member.¹³ The most likely interpretation is the last one if compared to the use of “all Israel” in the Old Testament (see 1 Sam 7:5; 25:1; 1 Kgs 12:1; 2 Chr 12:1; Dan 9:11). The phrase “all Israel” in the Old Testament is always used for the historic, ethnic Israel.¹⁴ Paul uses the phrase in the ethnic sense too and with the eschatological perspective he thinks of all Israel diachronically (considering every generation).¹⁵ “All” is a broad characterization of Israel in contrast with the “remnant” (11:15) and “some” (11:17). “All Israel” is parallel to the “full number” of the Gentiles “coming in” (11:25). Restoration of Israel will be a consequence of the Gentiles “entering into”.

2.2 Proof from the Scripture: v. 26b–27

In quoting Isa 59:20 Paul modifies the reading ἔνεκεν Σιών (“for the sake of Zion”) to ἐκ Σιών (“from Zion”). Paul could base this modification on Ps 14:7, 53:7 or Isa 2:3. Most likely he makes the change because of his mostly Gentile Christian audience and his thesis that there

¹⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 680.

¹¹ Ernst Käsemann and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Commentary on Romans*, 1st paperback ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 702.

¹² On the contrary, Jewett disputes that the word πᾶς (all) does not allow any exceptions. Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 702.

¹³ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 576.

¹⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*. 623. Fitzmyer notes that the phrase “all Israel” occurs 148 times in the OT and always designates historic, ethnic Israel, usually in the synchronic sense of the generations of Israel contemporary with the author, but in Mal 3:22 it has a diachronic sense, “all Israel of every generation.”

¹⁵ The eschatological perspective is also signaled by the verb σωθήσεται in the future tense.

is no distinction between Jews and Greeks.¹⁶ In the original sense of the quotation “the deliverer” to come was probably a reference to Yahweh himself. What does it mean for Paul? According to Dunn it is Christ in his *parousia* (see 1 Thes 1:10). Behind the words “from Zion”, Paul could see Christ’s eschatological appearance in Jerusalem (see 2 Thes 2:4.8), or his coming from the heavenly Jerusalem (see Gal 4:26).¹⁷ Similarly, Käsemann sees here a precondition of the *parousia*. For him, the reference is “to the return of the exalted Christ from heavenly Jerusalem of Gal 4:26”.¹⁸ Both Dunn and Käsemann relate the salvation of all Israel to his conversion. Käsemann explains his conviction as follows: “Whereas Christianity is already living in the new covenant, Israel will begin to do so only at the *parousia*, and it will do it through the same Giver, Christ, and with the related gift (see Jub. 22:14f.) of forgiveness of sins. Only the time, not the salvation, is different.”¹⁹ Fitzmyer is convinced, that Paul interprets the quotation christologically but without reference to Christ’s *parousia*. He thinks that not even the word ἥξει that is indicative future active does necessarily imply the *parousia*. He argues that in the chapters 9–11 there is no reference to *parousia* and this text could be taken as a *futurum propheticum* already being fulfilled (see 9:33, 11:28 with 15:8).²⁰ The deliverer will “turn away the ungodliness”, the impiety. This impiety is condemned in Rom 1:18 as a characteristic of pagans. In Jewett’s interpretation Israel’s impiety and sins consist in zealous hostility against the gospel.²¹ “Turning the ungodliness from Jacob”, from the people of Israel, indicates the nature of the deliverance.

In the next verse (27), Paul connects the quote from Isa 59:21 with Isa 27:9. “The covenant” is usually seen as a reference to the renewed or the more effective “new covenant” promised in Jer 31:31 (with possible allusion to Ezek 36:27 or 1 Cor 11:25). Paul’s change of the singular “his sin” to the plural “their sins” in the quotation could refer to particular deeds against the gospel and its messengers and not to the sins in general (see 1Thess 2:15–16). Paul presents his conviction of the divine salvation plan in Jewish terms, expressing his hope in theological rather than christological language. Forgiveness of sins was in Jewish thought connected with the renewal of covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Jub 22:14–15). Israel’s zeal, its clinging

¹⁶ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 703.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 682.

¹⁸ Käsemann and Bromiley, *Commentary on Romans*, 314.

¹⁹ Käsemann and Bromiley, *Commentary on Romans*, 314.

²⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 33 (New York (N.Y.): Doubleday, 1993), 625.

²¹ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 704.

to its own piety (Rom 10, 1–4) will be overcome by the deliverer and Israel's sins will be forgiven before the covenant will be restored.²² Dunn assumes that by the transposition of the hope of forgiveness from the cultic and ritual form to the eschatological sphere Paul emphasizes that the salvation is not based on national or ethnic foundations but on grace and faith.²³ Paul presents the "mystery" as a solution to the issue of the reception of the gospel.

2.3 Theological explanation of the mystery: v. 28–32

Verse 28 is a rhetorical parallelism. God has chosen Israel freely and graciously. They were his beloved because of his promises and blessings to their fathers, they were the seed of Abraham. But on the other side, "the false evaluation of that inheritance sets them in opposition to God."²⁴ What puts Israel into enmity with God is their rejection of the gospel.²⁵ In Paul's formulation the gospel and the election of Israel stand in opposition. Cranfield translates that "as regards the progress of the gospel they are enemies for your sake."²⁶ For him, the Jews are certainly beloved with regard to the gospel message and its content. They are enemies with regard to the progress of the gospel in the world, which means "surely, the actual accomplishment in the ministry, passion and resurrection of Jesus of the events which are the basis of the gospel message, the subsequent preaching by the Church, the acceptance or rejection of the message by man."²⁷ The parallelism "on account of fathers" gives no ground for the doctrine of merits as the promise to the fathers has a gracious character, enabling Paul to consider "even enemies as beloved".²⁸ Israel's enmity "regarding the gospel" benefits the Gentiles, (Rom 11:28 δι' ὑμᾶς), so that they can also share in the salvation promised to Israel.

Paul deduces from the Jewish hope that the dispersed Israel, and fallen into error, will be in the last days returned to the promised land and restored to righteousness. He emphasizes irrevocability God's purpose of salvation and underlines God's faithfulness. By the "gifts" (χαρίσματα), Paul refers to the gifts listed in Rom 9:4–5 and by the "call" (κλήσις)

²² Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 706.

²³ Dunn, *Romans*, 684.

²⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 685.

²⁵ A. Katherine Grieb notes that Israel is described as enemies of the gospel and not as enemies of God as NRSV, RSV, and many others translate on Rom 11:28. They are enemies for your sake. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans*, 1st edition. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 111.

²⁶ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 572.

²⁷ Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 284.

²⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 685.

he refers to the promise (Rom 9:8) and election (Rom 9:11) of Israel. It is also possible to understand these words as a *hendiadys* in the sense of “benefits of calling” or to take “calling” as one of the most important gifts.²⁹ The term κλησις alludes to the verb καλέω and Paul has most likely in mind the specific election of Israel by God (in the previous verse mentioned as ἐκλογή in particular the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–2) and his seed through Isaac (Rom 9:6–13).³⁰ In this respect verse 28 is related to Rom 11:1 and gives a resolute answer to the question of abandoning Israel by pointing to God’s irrevocable gifts and call. At the same time ἡ κλησις could also be a more general reference to the calling of Jews and Gentiles (see Phil 3:14).

Verses 30–31 form a skillful chiasmus with six protases and six apodoses that fit together and with the dative phrase (τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἔλξει) that can be connected to either ἡπείθησαν or ἐλεθῶσιν which leads to different meanings.³¹ These verses work with a division of two epochs (Adam’s and Christ’s), which is signaled by the placement of the words ποτε and νῦν. Both epochs, the time of disobedience and the time of divine mercy, include Israel. The “now-time” is divided into two phases: mercy to Gentiles alongside the disobedience of Jews and mercy to Jews. Disobedience of Jews as a manifestation and a result of disbelief makes possible the salvation of Gentiles. Dunn interprets Israel in the following way: “Israel would be saved being made jealous at the sight of Gentiles enjoying what had been their privileges (9:4–5) and so provoked into abandoning their unbelief in Jesus their Messiah and into acceptance of the gospel (1:16).”³²

The last verse of the passage (v. 32) presents a conclusion not only for the two previous ones, but also for the chapters 9–11. It takes the themes of human disobedience ἀπειθεία and divine mercy ἔλεος into relation. God has allowed people to use their freedom and hardened them (see Rom 11:7) which brings about their imprisonment³³ in their own disobedience

²⁹ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 708.

³⁰ Jewett, Kotansky, and Epp, *Romans*, 708.

³¹ For a general discussion of these possibilities see: Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 285–287; for more detail see: Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 582–586. Assigning of this dative phrase leads to different interpretations of Israel’s disobedience. When the words τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἔλξει are related to the ἡπείθησαν it could mean for example: because of or as a result of the mercy shown to Gentiles; for the sake of mercy shown to Gentiles; in the interest of the mercy shown to Gentiles etc. When the words τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἔλξει are related to the ἐλεθῶσιν the translations could be that they have been now disobedient, „in order that they too may now receive mercy by the mercy shown to you”. Taking τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἔλξει is taken with ἐλεθῶσιν makes for an exact correspondence between the two clauses in the *prothesis* and *apodosis*, with the structure 3:3 and 3:3.

³² Dunn, *Romans*, 691.

³³ God has imprisoned συνέκλεισεν all people τοὺς πάντας. The other variations are τὰ πάντα (P^{46vid} D* latt) or πάντα (F G; Ir) all (things) or everything (see Ga 3:22). See: Eberhard Nestle et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28. rev. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

(ἀπειθεία) and the only possibility for escape is God's mercy ἔλεος.³⁴ In a way this verse sums up Paul's main argument in the whole letter: God's wrath and handing over of all to their own free choices, God's mercy to the disobedient, mercy and blessing extended from Israel to all the nations, God's hardening directed to of the salvation of all, and faithfulness of God to all (Gentiles as well as Jews).³⁵ Both groups, Jews and Gentiles, were unfaithful to God, but God used this unfaithfulness for showing his mercy to all.

3 A short overview of different interpretations

We have seen that our passage poses several questions where an interpreter must make a choice. Who is Israel? What does the phrase "all Israel" mean? What does the "full number" of Gentiles mean? Who is the deliverer? By whom is Israel going to be saved? How does the deliverer come? What is Israel's ungodliness? Does Paul think that there is any special way for the salvation of Israel? Is the acceptance of the gospel and Jesus Christ an inevitable condition for their salvation?

There is a "theological" type of interpretation. The verb σωθήσεται "will be saved" is a divine passive, so Israel will be saved by God. Israel would be delivered by its partial hardening by the Deliverer, who is God (Yahweh) himself. This is independent of any acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah or a conversion to the gospel. This interpretation is based on the everlasting covenant that God has made with Israel. One of the arguments for this interpretation is that in the whole part from Rom 10:18 (where Paul is pondering the future of Israel) to the doxology of Rom 11:33–36, there is no mention of Jesus Christ. This interpretation is held by Stendahl, Getty, Lapide, Stuhlmacher.³⁶ Stendahl prefers to call his position God's "traffic plan"³⁷, remarking that God may change his plan, or that his plan can differ from what we are expecting.

Another interpretation is the "Christological" one. According to it the salvation of Israel cannot be apart from Christ who is the "deliverer". Fitzmyer distinguishes two subtypes of this interpretation: In the first one the salvation is related to the *parousia* of Christ

³⁴ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 589.

³⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 696.

³⁶ Zoccali adds here Gaston, Gager and Stowers. See: 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* 30.3 (2008): 297., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X07088405>.

³⁷ Krister Stendahl and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 7.

and the covenant is taken as a reference to Jer 31:33. Israel will be saved at the *parousia* without turning to the gospel. This means a “Sonderweg” (a special way) for Israel through the parousiac Christ. Among the proponents of this interpretation Fitzmyer counts Mussner, Gager, Mayer, Jocz. The second sub-type of this Christological interpretation insists that faith in Jesus Christ is indispensable for all human beings, both Gentiles and Jews also. For this interpretation it is of much more importance that the Letter to Romans as a whole and Paul’s gospel in general is addressed to all, Jews and Gentiles. Christ is the deliverer of Israel and the covenant (of Jer 31:33) is realized in Christ and not postponed to *parousia*. The proponents of this interpretation see nothing in the passage that would refer to *parousia*.³⁸ Fitzmyer places here scholars like Hvalvik, Campbell, Davies, Dahl, Hübner.

Apart from these general types there are other individual interpretations that are based on various other exegetical decisions. Quite early there appears to be the understanding that Israel for Paul consisted of Jews and Gentiles believing in Christ, or, to put it succinctly, that Paul substituted the church for Israel. This approach can be also called “ecclesiological”, or “replacement theology”. The possible basis for it could be Paul’s expression “Israel of God” in Gal 6, 16, recognized by many scholars as a reference to Jews and Gentiles “in Christ”, or some other Paul’s redefinitions (e.g., circumcision, “seed of Abraham”). The proponents of this interpretation are Calvin, Barth, and others. Against it there is the fact that in Romans there is no such redefinition of Israel³⁹. In our passage Paul rather puts Gentiles and Jews into contrast so it seems more probable that at least in this place Israel means the historical nation.

Another position reckons with an “eschatological miracle”: the future salvation of the historical Israel at *parousia* is envisioned in the same or similar manner as Paul’s conversion, i.e. through a direct revelation of Christ. In that way Israel will come to faith in him, so this is not a “Sonderweg”. This interpretation is held by e.g., Käsemann, Dunn, Jewett. “Total national elect”⁴⁰ is an interpretation that refers to the „complete number of the elect from the historical/empirical nation“. It was given this name by one of its proponents, Zoccali.

³⁸ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 620.

³⁹ Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letters*, First Edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 256.

⁴⁰ 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* 30.3 (2008): 289–318, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X07088405>.

An interesting interpretation is proposed by Nanos regarding the Roman mission. Paul's intention is to bring Romans back to the two-step pattern, beginning first with the restoration of Israel and then turning to Gentiles. Gentiles are saved before the second part of Israel that has been hardened. Israel would not be jealous of Gentiles being saved, but of Paul's ministry, watching in that ministry the eschatological privilege of Israel to be the light to the Gentiles is being fulfilled. According to Nanos the deliverer does not need to be interpreted christologically.⁴¹ I will pay closer attention to this interpretation in the next part.

4 Beyond the New Perspective on Paul and their remarks

The article could end with these abovementioned interpretations⁴² and the proponents of the traditional interpretations would be somehow comfortable. But what if we are changing the perspectives and continue with the newest one? Scholars, united in the platform Beyond the New Perspective on Paul, emphasize that Letter to Romans should be interpreted as Paul's words addressed to Non-Jews⁴³ and they are also against the thoughts that this letter is Paul's universalistic theological teaching. That Paul's addressees are Non-Jews is supported by various facts, that in the introduction Paul is depicting himself as an apostle of the Nations, in a dedication of the letter (Rom 1:5), in an apology (Rom 1:13), in chapters 9–11 (see 11:13) and in 15:14–19.⁴⁴ Paul's intention is to solve a tense situation between Non-Jews and Jewish cobelievers and gain their support for his Spanish mission project.⁴⁵

Ábel in his study "The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11:25–27," describes different treatments of the non-Jewish nations in Jewish eschatological traditions and notions and concludes that

⁴¹ Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 238–288.

⁴² Except the one proposed by Nanos, that one is of the new interpretations.

⁴³ František Ábel, *List apoštola Pavla Rimanom: čítanie, exegéza a výklad listu v kontexte judaizmu obdobia druhého chrámu. Prvá časť, Prolegomena* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, Evanjelická bohoslovecká fakulta, 2021), 38. Ábel stands with Campbell (*Nations*) and Das (*Solving the Romans Debate*) in the issue of the addressee, that they were exclusively non-Jewish addressees, while Stenschke, Jewett, Wolter claims that Letter to Romans is addressed to the communities of Jesus-believers in Rome, Jewish as well as Gentile (see 1:7). See: František Ábel, "Elijah in the Message of Paul the Apostle. Typology of the Elijah Figure in Paul's Missionary Zeal for the Gospel" *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 13 (2/2021): 266–295. For interpreting of our place, (Rom 9–11), we can be more open, since our passage is directed to Gentiles in Christ and we do not have to be so strict about the rest of the letter considering the potential addressee or listeners. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ábel, *List apoštola Pavla Rimanom*, 151.

⁴⁵ Ábel, *List apoštola Pavla Rimanom*, 151.

"what is novel, and to a considerable extent even contradictory to all known Jewish notions about the eschatological restoration of Israel, is Paul's assertion that the salvation of Gentiles is not a side effect or consequence of Israel's redemption – which was to happen first – but quite the opposite. As he [Paul] words it, first the full number of the Gentiles will come in, and only then, and in such a manner, will all Israel be saved."⁴⁶

4.1 The question of identity

We have here some points that are crucial for our survey. One of them is the question of identity, Jewish as well as non-Jewish. Previous studies weren't so sufficient in defining the meaning of the terms depicting the identity of Israel, all Israel, remnant, etc. Although not all scholars within the new perspective on Paul have the same view, the majority of them are in agreement about the identity terms used in our text. Gentiles remains gentiles. Paul envisages the continued existence of the identity of Gentiles in Christ that remain Gentiles of a special sort, "since they have adopted Jewish attributes, meaning that they have acquired a new identity by a new manner of life."⁴⁷ Paula Fredriksen depicts this new identity brilliantly:

"Paul's gospel itself demanded a radical degree of 'Judaizing.' Paul absolutely insisted that his gentiles-in-Christ assume the two uniquely *Jewish* behaviours that were the most socially conspicuous in a diaspora setting. These people were to make an exclusive commitment to the Jewish god, and they were to desist, absolutely, from making offerings before images of their native gods. Paul's ex-pagan pagans, in short, were to kept (at least) the first two of Sinai's Ten Commandments: No other gods, and no idols."⁴⁸

Through reception of spirit they have become the adopted sons thanks to Christ. The nations do not join the Israel and those stumbling Jews are still Israel. As Ábel points out:

"Their temporary unbelief should be considered rather in the context of Jewish Deuteronomic theology, not as their dismissing of the promises. They remain in covenantal standing, but, as Mark Nanos notes, "in need of 'safe-keeping': if

⁴⁶ František Ábel, "The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11:25–27," In: *Journal of the Jesus Movement in Its Jewish Setting. From the First to the Seventh Century*. (2020), https://www.academia.edu/44643216/The_Role_of_Israel_Concerning_the_Gentiles_in_the_Context_of_Romans_11_25_27. 26–53.

⁴⁷ Ábel, "The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11", 26–53.

⁴⁸ Paula Fredriksen, *God Is Jewish, but Gentiles Don't Have to Be: Ethnicity and Eschatology in Paul's Gospel*. in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. František Ábel (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 3–20. Then she continues to explain: "these uncircumcised pneumatic ex-pagan gentiles remain distinct *kata sarka* from ethnic Israel. Pneumatic lineage is not fleshly – and that is the point. Gentile *adelphoi*, now adopted, are also sons of Abraham. As such, they are now enabled through spirit to fulfill Israel's laws (Rom 13:8–10; see Gal 5:14–18; 1 Cor 7:20). But adopted *adelphoi* are still not Israel." *Ibid*.

punished, however severely, this would represent discipline according to covenantal (family) terms *as* Israel, which is not the same as being dismissed from standing Israel.”⁴⁹

“All Israel” means all twelve tribes, itself an eschatological idea. And in the case of Gentiles, “Paul’s language here echoes that of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, with its traditional count of seventy nations, the global human census of seventy kinship groups distinguished by family, language, land and peoples.”⁵⁰ The full number of Gentiles most probably include Paul’s prospective Hispanic converts and the financial collection has primarily a theological significance proving the real character of a community between Gentile nations in Christ and Israel. By giving this monetary gift Gentiles are participating in the worship of the God of Israel.⁵¹ Ehrensperger even says that Paul does not have a necessity to define the identity of “all Israel” (which indicates clarity on Paul’s side) and he creates a vacant space that is directed to God’s sovereignty and the wisdom.⁵² Here I strongly agree with Ehrensperger. Moreover, my hypothesis, since Paul is so great at playing with words, images, even the emotions, making conundrums that are throughout the whole letter, is that Paul could have made this intentionally, and deliberately left these places around the mystery foggy, although I agree with the majority of scholars from *The Beyond the New Perspective on Paul* that when Paul is talking about Israel he has the Jewish people in mind.

4.2 Nanos and his new exegetical approach

Here I would like to briefly examine again the perspective and exegetical notes of Mark Nanos. He is a proponent of the New perspective on Paul within Judaism and interprets Paul’s texts within Judaism. He notices that in Rom 11:25–26 Paul uses a language that is similar to planting.

According to Nanos, Paul writes in Rom 11:25 about the time “when the “fullness [πλήρωμα]” of the nations will arrive, which is just the way that full blooming or fruitfulness is described for plants” and in Rom 11:26 “the ultimate goal is described as the “salvation [σωθήσεται]” of all Israel, in metaphorical plant terms, its being “kept/made safe,”

⁴⁹ František Ábel, “Elijah in the Message of Paul the Apostle. Typology of the Elijah Figure in Paul’s Missionary Zeal for the Gospel” *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 13 (2/2021): 266–295.

⁵⁰ Fredriksen, “God Is Jewish, but Gentiles Don’t Have to Be: Ethnicity and Eschatology in Paul’s Gospel” in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. František Ábel, 3–20.

⁵¹ Ábel, “The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11”, 26–53.

⁵² Kathy Ehrensperger, *Searching Paul*, 1st ed., Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 334.

“protected,” “healed” or “restored”.⁵³ His interpretation of Rom 11:25–26 follows the image of olive tree and although it seems to contradict this metaphor, according to him, Paul is instructive in the image of the olive tree by not explaining or naming what is the trunk or branches or the tree, but only the branches. Paul’s aim with the use of this image of olive tree is not to create a picture of Israel or the church, but rather „to explain the unusual and precarious place of the Christ-following non-Jews among the Israelites, so that they will humbly understand their own role is by God’s design to live on behalf of all Israel’s restoration, not to (mis)judge those Israelites in a temporary state of suffering.”⁵⁴ These Israelites have been temporarily “enemied”, that is according to Nanos “alienated” or “estranged” by God for the sake of the non-Israelites. If part of the Israel is suffering vicariously “for your (nations) sake” that ought to induce empathy⁵⁵. What is really interesting is that Paul does not use the word for hardening Pharaoh’s heart (σκληρός), but instead he chooses the word πώρωσις, which is usually used as a medical term referring to (a) callus.⁵⁶ Callus involves hardening, but in this case it is for a positive purpose, since calluses promotes healing. Callus is used also positively in planting terminology.

Nanos also suggests a literal translation of Rom 11:25–26 in this way:

“(25) For I do not want you to be unperceptive regarding this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you would not be mindful (only) for yourselves, that a callus temporarily has formed for Israel, until (the time) when the fullness of the nations should commence, (26) and in this way (or: and then) all Israel will be restored [or: made safe], just as it was written.”⁵⁷

I found Mark Nanos’ perspective really stimulating. He harmonizes and explains the discrepancies between the series of metaphors and finds new interconnections. His connection to botanical terminology seems excellent. Concerning his literal translation, which is really precise and new, I still need to ask whether the nuances presented in his literal translation of this passage are not attainable and visible in the works of scholars classified as traditional perspectives.

⁵³ Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos, Vol. 2* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 194.

⁵⁴ Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism*, 163.

⁵⁵ Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism*, 196.

⁵⁶ Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism*, 192.

⁵⁷ Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism*, 176.

5 Conclusion

I have presented the interpretation of Rom 11:25–32 pointing to the salvation of historical Israel at the *parousia*. As it can be seen the views of the scholars differ because of Paul's unclear vision and numerous ambiguities in this text. In addition to the overview of a couple of other positions of various scholars that mingle and compete with each other, I have shortly presented views and remarks of The Beyond the New Perspective on Paul with a focus on the new exegetical approach by Mark Nanos, surveying the plant terminology and the discrepancies between Paul's multiple metaphors. The aim of this contribution was to examine Paul's passage of Rom 11:25–32 and present the prevalent interpretations. While traditional perspectives gave us a foundation, the newest one is oriented on the accuracy of concrete terms and I would say that they better equipped to interpret the identity of Israel and their present state and restoration in Rom 9–11.

I strongly agree with the scholars from Beyond the New perspective on Paul that when Paul is talking about Israel, he has the Jewish people in his mind. The metaphor of the olive tree, wonderfully analyzed by Mark Nanos is not about Israel, but rather God's people. I would say that Romans, or at least Rom 9–11, is addressed to non-Jewish "Christians". I agree with some of the proponents that there is still a possibility that others, such as Jewish "Christians", could get to hear Paul's letter. However, I think that Paul would have been aware of this possibility. Moreover, the ambivalence in which Paul is using the terms around Israel, and the present state and future restoration is striking. Therefore, I think that Paul used his words in this way intentionally.

Paul confirms that Israel's stumble was in God's plan or in God's purpose for the world. Divine control is overall. God's faithfulness to Israel would be demonstrated in the end. And not only to Israel, but to all. Both Gentiles and Jews have the same position – disobedience and both have the same solution from that disobedience – divine mercy. Paul ends up the present passage with great doxology on God's wisdom and knowledge of God, that underlines the majesty of God who has mercy.

The interconnection of multiple themes from the whole letter makes this passage an integral part of Paul's theology and very important for interpreting Paul. Some scholars even consider this passage as not only the climax of the chapters 9–11 but as a climax of the whole letter. By inquiring into a different interpretation we can see how often interpreters are influenced by their past or present time and what these distinctions are.

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