Yes, God is in Perfect Control
Romans 11:25-32

We quickly coming to the end of chapter 11, and this section that began dealing with the purposes of Israel way back at the start of chapter 9. And last time we emphasized the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and in his history. This passage should humble us and cause us to glory in the One whose will always comes to pass, and his promises are yes and amen in Christ. We saw last time that a partial hardening of Israel has come until this time frame known as the "fullness of the Gentiles" where we see bountiful salvation extended to the nations and the peoples of the world. But we also saw that God is not done with the Jewish people but after this time will bring bountiful salvation to the nation through the blood of Jesus Christ.

As I was studying for this, I read the conversation that happened between Frederick the Great King of Prussia and his chaplain. Frederick was being influenced by the atheist Voltaire, and asked the chaplain if he could prove if the Bible were true, and if it was written by God it should be easy to prove that it was. And he requested that the chaplain prove the inspiration of the Scriptures in one word. The chaplain replied with these words, "**Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request literally. I can give you the proof you ask for in one word.**" The king asked what this magical word was that carried such weight of proof. And the chaplain replied - "**Israel**."

And certainly there are many proofs that can be offered as far as the Bibles authenticity, but certainly this one is one of them and a strong argument. You look at the Jewish nation and it has never been mighty or large. They have been a people who have been disposed of their lands many times. And what happens is that people end up just being absorbed into the people around them over time, but not with Israel. And a people hated throughout their history, even recent history and yet they still exist. And the question we could ask ourselves is why do they exist? And the reason why is that the God of eternity still has purposes and promises for the nation and the people. Again, God is the one who is controlling history. And one of the things that should encourage us as the people of God is the ongoing survival of Israel as the people of God. We are ultimately in his hands, and it is the sovereign control and the faithfulness of our God that will bring to pass every promise that he has given us.

And we saw that last time we were together. We saw at the beginning of verse 26, "**And in this way all Israel will be saved.**" This is a prophecy. This is something that will come to pass. We are not the pinnacle of human history. And this is meant to humble any of us who would conclude that we are somehow better than the Jewish nation and people. And what Paul intends to do is prove what he has just said through the O.T. Scriptures. And this really is the pinnacle of his argument. And there is so much debate about the end times and what will take place. But what we must endeavour to do is not give way to conjecture and imagination, but at the same time bow before the God of text whether what he says fits into our scheme of how we think God should operate.

And certainly God doesn't answer all our questions that we have about the future, but he does at times lift the curtain to show what he will accomplish, and the reason is that we know that all that he has promised is secure, and that our hope would be ultimately in him. Remember, one of the reasons for this long section is the

assurance of our salvation through Jesus Christ in Romans 8 - nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And here we come to the end of that assurance because God's word and promises have not failed to the Jewish people. So what I want to do is go through the quote, seek to understand it, and draw some conclusions from what Paul teaches here.

1. We need to understand the text. Vv.26-27

As we look at this quotation, behind this truth are a couple things. One is that God is a perfect, thereforeGod does not change. He is immutable. He is the same today, yesterday and today. We are constantly changing but he never changes. He is perfect God, and you cannot bring any change into that which is perfect because you would be introducing imperfection. We realize that truth and we glory in God. But because God does not change, his purposes do not change. Throughout all the upheavals of history, and all the twists and turns that we have even seen in the last few years none of God purposes have been thwarted. Everything that God has promised will come to pass. Our trust is not having a certain political party in power or having our desires to come to pass. Our confidence is in God whose ultimate will - will come to pass. And passages like this should encourage us with all the promises that God has made to us.

Now look at verse 26, "**The Deliverer will come from Zion.**" Here we see this prophecy, and it is taken mainly from Isaiah 59:20-21, and also Isaiah 27:9. And what is happening in Isaiah 59 is that God has something against Israel. In verse 2 we read, "**but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.**" The first section of that chapter in verses 1-8 is all about the sins of Israel. The second section is that these accusations are true in verses 9-15a, and then the last section in verses 15b-21, and the it is what God will do, how he will change the people and establish justice and peace in the land, and it is by turning the people away from their sin to him.

Now there are two ways that this prophecy can be interpreted. The first is the "Deliverer will come," as talking about the first coming of Jesus. He has come and he has offered his life as that perfect offering for sin so that he might turn the hearts of his people from their sin to trust in him. And there are some that take this passage and interpret this way. But I cannot see how you can really interpret that way, because what Paul is proving by quoting this text is the truth that he has just stated, and that is "all Israel will be saved." It is speaking of something that has not happened but will happen. Jesus will come and turn the hearts of the Israelites back after him. He will come and he comes from Zion which speaks of his humanity and a reminder to Gentile believers of Jesus' Jewish origin.

But also look what he will do in verse 27, "**and this will be my covenant with them.**" The key word here is covenant. And amazingly this is only the second time the word covenant is used in the Book of Romans. The other is in 9:4 where Paul is naming the advantages of the Jews. And a covenant is an agreement between two or more persons. There are covenants between people in the Scripture but the most significant is between God and man. And they are basically God's promise to do something. They have his faithfulness and power behind every covenant. And there are two kinds of

covenants that God makes with man. There are conditional covenants. The meaning behind those is that a condition has to be met in order for the blessing to come from God. The Mosaic covenant is an example of that. Listen to Deut. 28:1-6, "**And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out**."

And then if they do not live up to the terms of the covenant, then punishment will come against them. Deut. 28:15-19 is almost parallel with the blessings, "**But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.**" So it is basically obedience and blessing, and disobedience will bring curses from God.

But there are other covenants that are unconditional or unilateral. He gives the promises and God lives up to the terms of the covenant and will bring it to pass regardless of the person or what the other person does. There is a dramatic example of this kind of covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. God commands Abraham to prepare several animals for a covenant ceremony. The animals were slain and cut in two, and both parties would stand in between or walk through the midst of the slain animals while confessing and agreeing on the terms of this covenant. God was going to make a covenant with Abraham. But that evening when it was to be ratified. God caused a deep sleep to come on Abraham, and he passed through the midst. And we read in Gen.15:17-18, "**When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.**" God would bring the covenant to pass. God is speaking of what he would do irregardless of what Abraham would do.

Now look at what Paul quotes here from Isaiah and these are the words of God, "**and will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.**" Notice whose covenant it is. It is God's, and notice God is indicating what he will do. He will take away their sin. And listen to what John Murray writes, "**The effect is that the future restoration of Israel is certified by nothing less than the certainty belonging to covenantal institution.**" God will take away their sin, and they will be his people. He is not done with the Jews or the nation itself.

And parallel with this is what we read in verse 26, "**he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.**" And the meaning here is that the whole society and functionality of the nation will be different. Just like we say that we are saved by grace alone, that grace is never alone. It changes our lives. So the grace of this movement in the Jews will bring a radical change in the nation of Israel.

2. Now what observations can we glean from this passage?

And I think there are several. And one is that I believe a passage like this should help us interpret many passages in the Old Testament. This passage speaks that God has not thrown off his promises given to the nation of Israel, and that he will bring them to pass. One of the popular ways to take many of the passages of the Old Testament that talk about the restoration of Israel is to spiritualized or allegorize the passage as talking about the blessing that will come on the church, but it is not talking about literal and physical blessings of Israel. I do not know how you can take a passage like that and interpret those Old Testament passage, even the Old Testament passages as not referring to Israel and not the church of Christ.

Listen to Psalm 89:31-37, "**if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes, but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.**" Now look at what God says here. He will not remove his steadfast love from Israel. He will not violate the covenant or the promise he made to the nation. And notice that they will endure forever.

There are two systems of theology, one is dispensationalism, and the other covenant theology. And they are ways of looking at the big picture of the Bible or understanding the Bible as a whole. Dispensationalism sees God working through different dispensations or administrations to get his will done. Covenant theology sees God working through two main covenants - a covenant of works and the covenant of grace, but many covenantal theologians, not all, see the church as replacing Israel. I don't get into all the charts or non-sense of reading the headlines back into the Bible that many dispensationalists do. But I am a dispensationalist because of two doctrines. One is ecclesiology which is the doctrine of the church. I do not see Israel as the Old Testament church, but I do see Israel as distinct from the church, and there were certain promises that were given to them that still have to be fulfilled. The other doctrine is eschatology, or the doctrine of the end times. So often individuals read the church back into the Old Testament and the church was not even a matter of revelation in the Old Testament. They take the blessing and future of Israel that has geographical and political promises and they make it figurative rather than literal.

We all know the glorious prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, "**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**" It talks about the coming of Christ. But listen to the next verse, "**Of the**

increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." That prophecy has never come to pass. Notice where he sits - on the throne of David, and there is a government that has no ends, and there is justice and righteousness. That is a promise that is given to Israel.

So when you look at this passage here in Romans 11, and how it handles the Old Testament as Israel having promises that are distinctively Israel we have to interpret those passages just like Israel would have when they were given the promises that they were talking about Israel. God is true to his word and true to his promises to his Old Testament people Israel.

The other thing that we have to conclude by these verses and by this whole passage is that there is only one way of salvation. There are not two. One for the Jew and one for the church, but only one. Again, it is amazing to look at this word covenant. There are thirty six uses of the word in the N.T. Over half of those uses are in the book of Hebrews which is written to Jewish believers who were tempted because of trial and persecution to go back to Judaism. And listen to what he says in Heb. 8:6, "**But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.**" This is a superior covenant. He is not saying that the historical promises of Israel have been done away with. He is talking about how one comes into the presence of God. And there has always been one way and that way is through faith in Jesus Christ and the blood that he shed. That is why Abraham and David earlier in chapter 4 were justified in God's sight. The book of Hebrews draws to an end in this way in Heb. 13:20-21, "**Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**" There is only one way of salvation, and that is through the blood of Christ. Certainly this covenant is superior and replaces the Mosaic covenant. But there are promises for Israel in both the Mosaic and Davidic that are both unconditional covenants that still have to come to pass.

Last, this section teaches us that God is faithful. All Israel will be saved. All the unilateral promises made to the nation will come to pass. And that means that we serve a faithful God who will keep us as his people. All his promises can be banked on. I could not be more certain and assured of the certainty of the truthfulness of God's promises when I see that he will not go back on his word. There is still a people of Israel that has been sustained by the mighty hand of our Lord. Revel in his faithfulness and the assurance of all the promises that are ours in Christ Jesus!