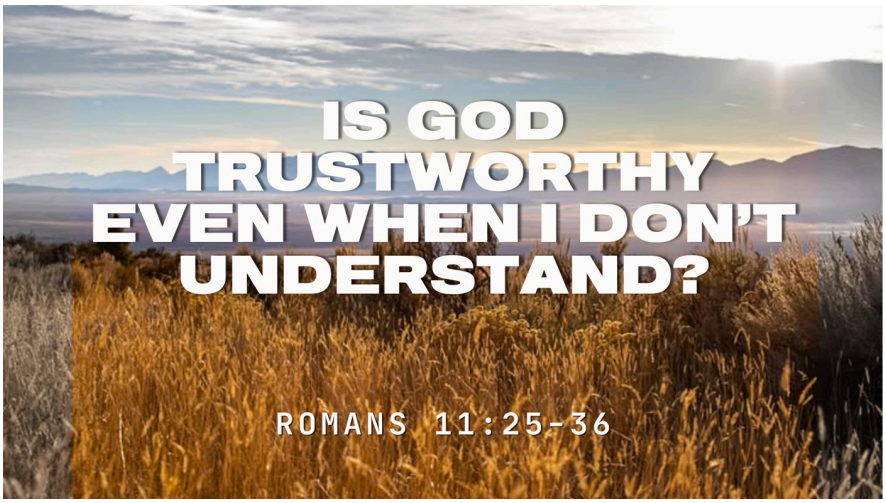
CCLEB SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026
ROMANS 11:25-36

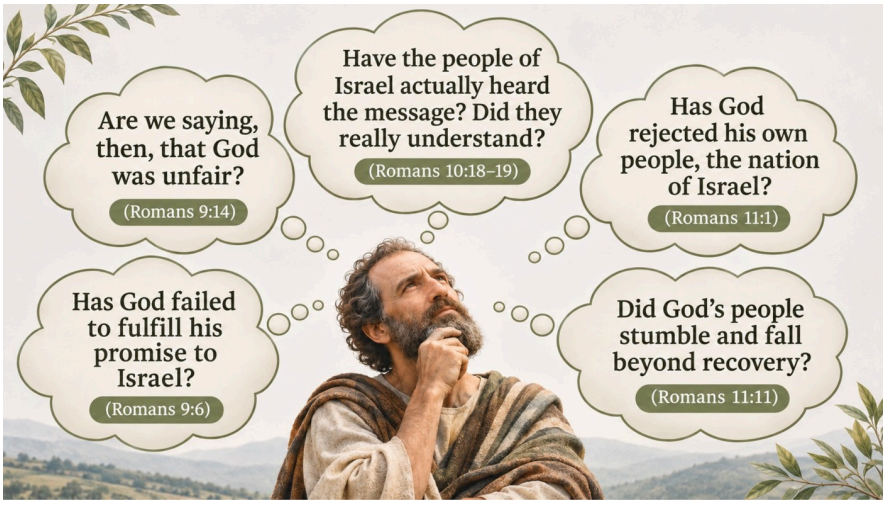
PASTOR DUANE MILLER

IS GOD TRUSTWORTHY EVEN WHEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND?

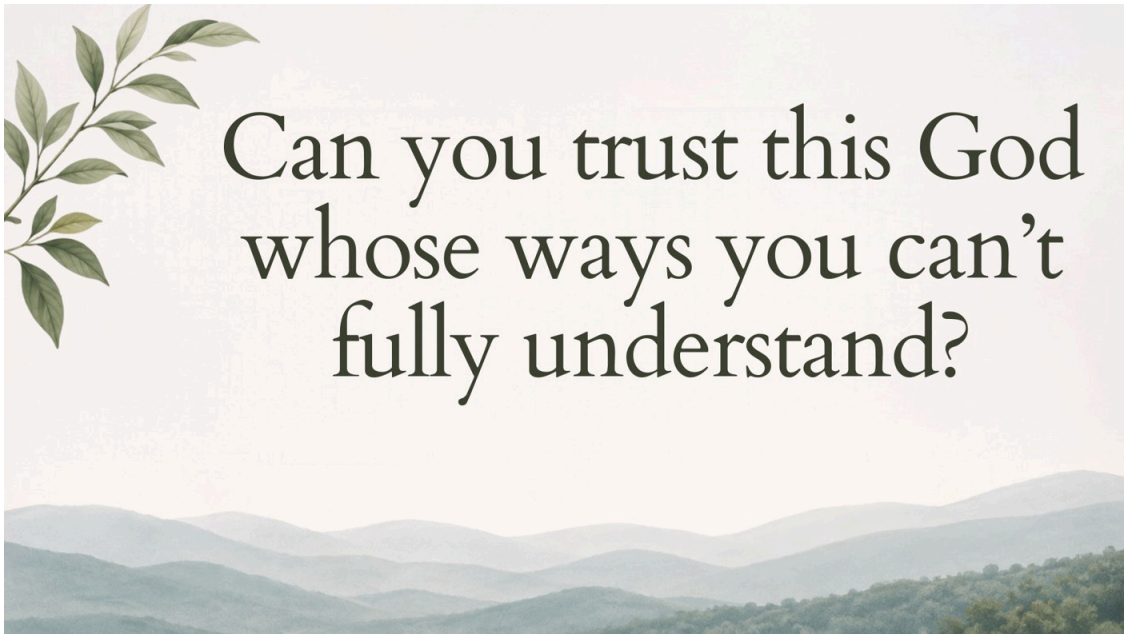


It's an honor to worship and study God's Word with you. Today we are talking about God's faithfulness: his trustworthiness. We've been working through **Romans 9–11**, where Paul is deeply concerned for the salvation of his fellow Jews, most of whom have rejected their own Messiah, Jesus.

Israel's rejection of Jesus raises five big questions about God, and Paul answers each one:



Through them all, Paul defends God as faithful, sovereign, merciful, just, and loving. Today we close out this section with one more question, and this one is for your heart and mine:



I had a challenging start to my week, so this passage is for me. Maybe it's for you too. When we don't understand what is happening around us… when things look bleak… when we're struggling to hold on to trust… when our emotions swing between hurt and fear… when present circumstances are so big and glaring that they blind us to the big picture… can you trust this God whose ways you can't fully understand?

Paul's answer is yes. And as your pastor, I affirm that yes with all my heart. In **verses 25–36**, Paul invites you to discover this same trustworthy God.

How did Paul come to trust God even when he didn't understand God's ways? Part of the answer is that he was willing to ask the tough questions. And every one of those questions in **chapters 9–11** has led us back to the same truth: God is sovereign, merciful, just, loving, and trustworthy. Sometimes when we ask tough questions, we end up with understanding, and that gives us peace. And sometimes when we ask tough questions, rather than understanding, we get peace.

My challenge to you today is to consider that, despite not understanding God's ways at times, God's history of interacting with mankind has shown again and again that he is faithful, sovereign, merciful, just, and loving – all of that meaning he is worthy of your trust.

Today, Paul gives us a picture of the future that deepens that trust.

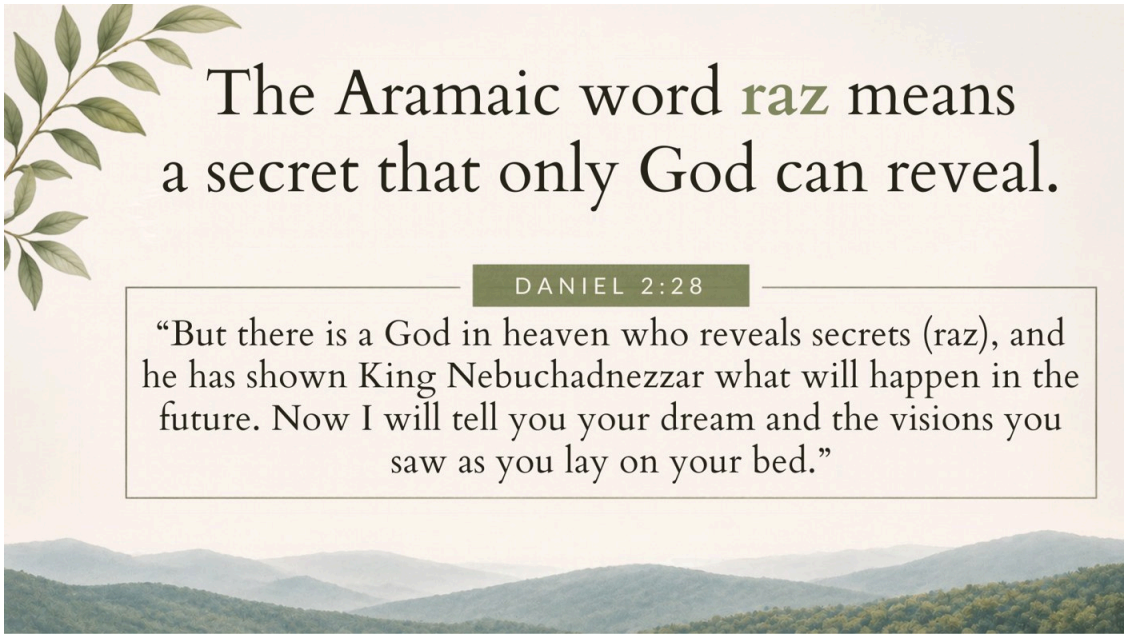
The setting for this lesson on God's trustworthiness is Gentile pride in the Roman church. Remember, the letter to the Romans addresses the division between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and pride on both sides was a main source of that division, as it always is.

Verse 25 continues last week's warning about pride from **verses 18–20**: Gentiles must not brag about being grafted in where Jews were broken off for their hard hearts, as if Gentiles held a privileged position with God.

Let's pause here. Whenever Scripture warns against pride, we all need to listen, because pride is the birthplace of so many other sins. This is for all of us.

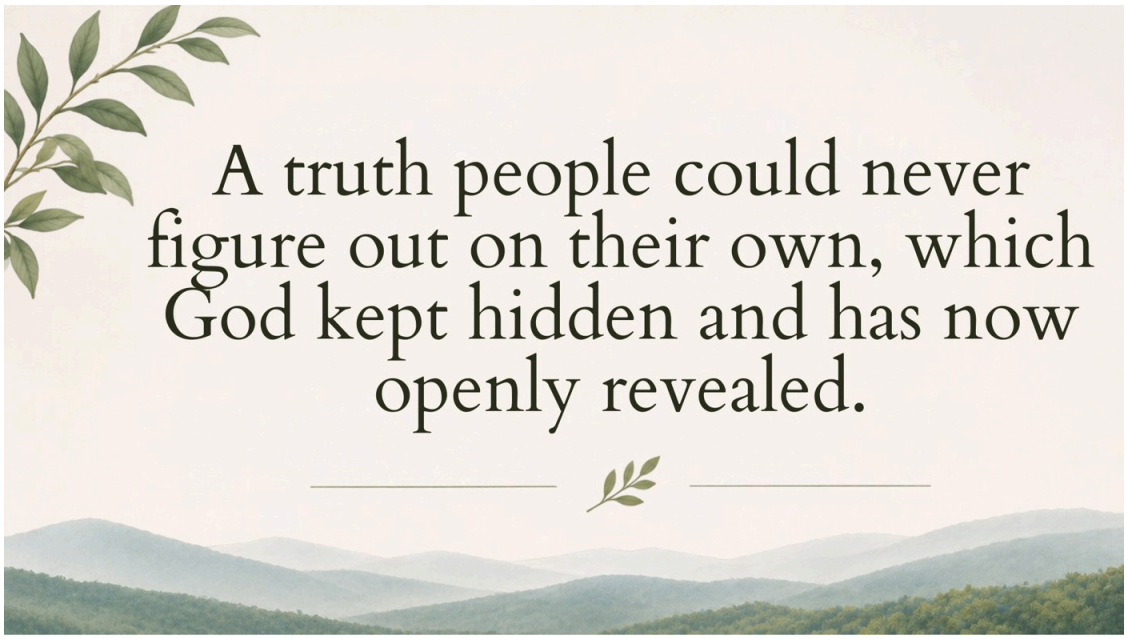
In **verse 25**, Paul humbles the Gentiles by telling them about "the mystery." Intriguing, right? This word has a fascinating biblical background.

It goes back to the Old Testament. In **Daniel 2:28**, Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets." The Aramaic word *raz* means a secret that only God can reveal.



When the Old Testament was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), *raz* became *mystērion*, the same word Paul uses here.

So a biblical *mystery* is not an unsolvable puzzle or a secret for a select few. It is a truth people could never figure out on their own, which God kept hidden and has now openly revealed.



Now bring that back to Jewish hard hearts and Gentile pride in Romans. Until **verse 25**, there seems to be no hope that Jewish hearts will ever soften. Nothing looks like it will change; they will remain lost. Meanwhile, Gentiles are coming to Christ in far greater numbers, and they're questioning God's plan for the Jews. They can't figure it out, and on their own, they never would.

Until they were let in on a secret, a mystery regarding how and when Jewish hearts would soften toward their Messiah.

When you can't figure something out on your own, it's frustrating and humbling. For a know-it-all like me, that really sucks! I'm sure you've been there: you try and try and just can't get it. Then someone explains it, or you watch a YouTube video, or someone just does it for you, and it's done. You can't be proud of figuring it out yourself.

The same is true for the Gentiles. They can't be proud of figuring out something they only know because God told them.

God saw the Gentiles questioning his plan for the Jews. They couldn't figure out what he was doing, so through Paul, God let them in on the secret – the mystery.

So here is the mystery God revealed through Paul, to them and to us, and in it we learn about God's trustworthiness. **Verse 25b**: Israel's hard hearts "will last only until…"

In other words: yes, the Jews have rejected Jesus, and their hearts are hard now, but it won't always be that way. A time is coming when their hearts will soften and turn to the Lord. That's the revelation. When you know change is coming, that brings hope.

Let's talk about hope and change for a minute. Hope expects change. What seems like it will never change – the status quo, the things that are stuck – will one day end. That's hope.

Job had hope of change in the middle of physical torment and intense grief. Listen to his words in **Job 19:25–27**: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand…”

Job said this before anything changed for him. Now take that back to **Romans 11**. Israel’s heart was, and is, hard toward the Messiah. But just like Job’s situation, that is not the end of their story. Paul tells us change is coming for Jewish hearts. Praise the Lord!

And in **Romans 11:25**, Paul gives us more than hope that Israel’s hard hearts will change. He also sort of tells us when. That’s really important!

When we don’t understand what is happening around us… when things look bleak… when we’re struggling to hold on to trust… when our emotions swing between hurt and fear… knowing that change is coming, and having some sense of when, is huge. It helps us hold on. It keeps us from giving up and giving in to the darkness. It helps us trust a God whose ways we can’t fully understand.

Paul says in **verse 25** that Israel’s hardening will last only “until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ.”

This is prophecy, so those of you who love prophecy will like this. This prophecy, the secret Paul reveals, tells us two things.

First, Gentiles and Jews alike are living in a time that has an end. One day, what we now call normal will end; it will change. Something significant is going to happen that brings the change Paul is talking about.

Second, that change is tied to a specific moment: when “the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ.”

What does Paul mean by that? It’s a much-debated phrase.

The Greek doesn’t actually say “comes to Christ”; it says “comes in” (**Romans 11:25b NASB**). “Comes in” could mean coming into the flock, or being grafted into the tree, or, as the context suggests, coming into the covenant family of God, the church, through Jesus Christ.

Read plainly, a time will come when the last Gentile accepts Christ and comes into God’s covenant family, and that moment seems to trigger, or coincide with, the softening of Jewish hearts.

For those of you who think in terms of a prophetic timeline, this seems to fit with the rapture of the church. From that perspective, a small remnant of Jews is being saved now, but after the rapture, God’s focus turns back to Israel, and those numbers grow rapidly.

This ties to Daniel’s 70th week (**Daniel 9**), the 144,000 sealed from the tribes of Israel (**Revelation 7**), the two witnesses preaching in Jerusalem (**Revelation 11**), and the Jewish remnant protected in the wilderness (**Revelation 12**).

There are other views on what **Romans 11:25** means, and I've included them in the bonus content at the end of these notes.

Now, prophecy matters. But I really dislike when differing interpretations of prophecy lead to contention, division, and broken fellowship among believers. As your shepherd, I have little tolerance for that. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to bring supernatural unity, and he fills us with his love to give to others, with no biblical exceptions among believers. Amen?

Now let's bring this back to our question: Can you trust this God whose ways you don't fully understand?

Let's keep going. **Verses 26–27** show how complete this change will be. Where only a remnant has been coming into God's family through Christ now, Paul says that in the future "all Israel will be saved." Here he quotes **Isaiah 59:20–21** and **Isaiah 27:9**.

And notice: **verse 27** puts the spotlight on God, faithfully keeping his covenant promise to take away Israel's sins.

Let me put it this way. Say you have a huge problem you don't understand and can't solve. Someone comes along and says, "I'll take care of it," and then they do. Once your problem is solved, how important is it that you understand how they did it?

Now listen. I don't understand all of God's ways or how he brings about redemption for his people. But I plainly see in this text that God does exactly what he says he will do. In the end, he takes away Israel's sins. This is a God who is trustworthy.

That's Paul's point: God is worthy of our trust even when we don't understand his ways.

In **verse 28**, Paul describes Israel in their current state as "enemies of the Good News" because of their hard hearts and unbelief. But that doesn't change the fact that God still loves them. They are, after all, the people of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In that covenant, he called them to himself and gave them what they needed to be his covenant family. And we know from Abraham's story that his faith was credited to him as righteousness. That's the gift. That's mercy.

Verse 29 is likewise about God's faithfulness.

Imagine a friend calls and offers you tickets to see your favorite band: "Just meet me at the gate, and they're yours." You're thrilled, so you go. But when you get there, your friend says, "Sorry, I just gave them to someone else." How would you feel? Beyond disappointed, you'd probably decide that person isn't trustworthy.

God is not like that. He called and gifted Israel's forefathers and their descendants to be his covenant family through faith, which he credits as righteousness, showing them mercy they don't deserve. And Paul says God's gifts and his call on the Israelites "can never be withdrawn."

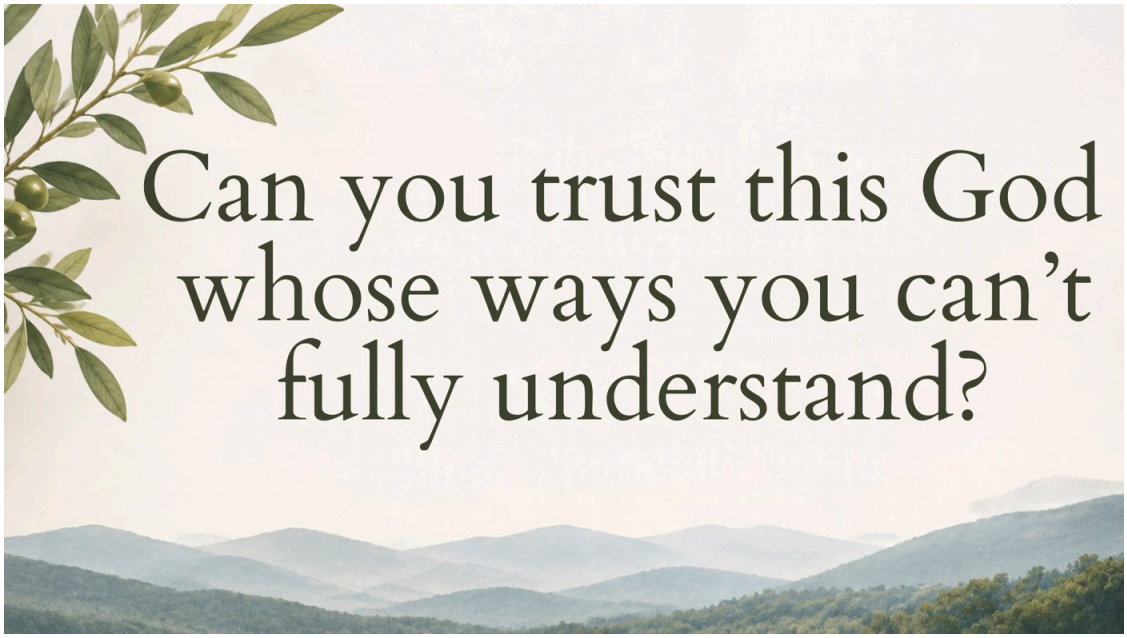
Some apply this verse to the general calling and gifting of all Christians. That may be true, but it takes the verse out of the context of Paul's argument. Here, Paul simply wants the Gentiles to recognize God's trustworthiness in keeping his covenant with the Jews.

In **verses 30–32**, Paul unites divided Jews and Gentiles by stating that both have equally received God's mercy.

If Jews and Gentiles alike receive God's mercy through faith in Jesus Christ, on what grounds then is there division?

And with that, Paul bursts into praise, declaring God's faithfulness and trustworthiness even beyond our understanding. **Verses 33–35**.

My friends, this is a God you can trust. So let me ask you again:

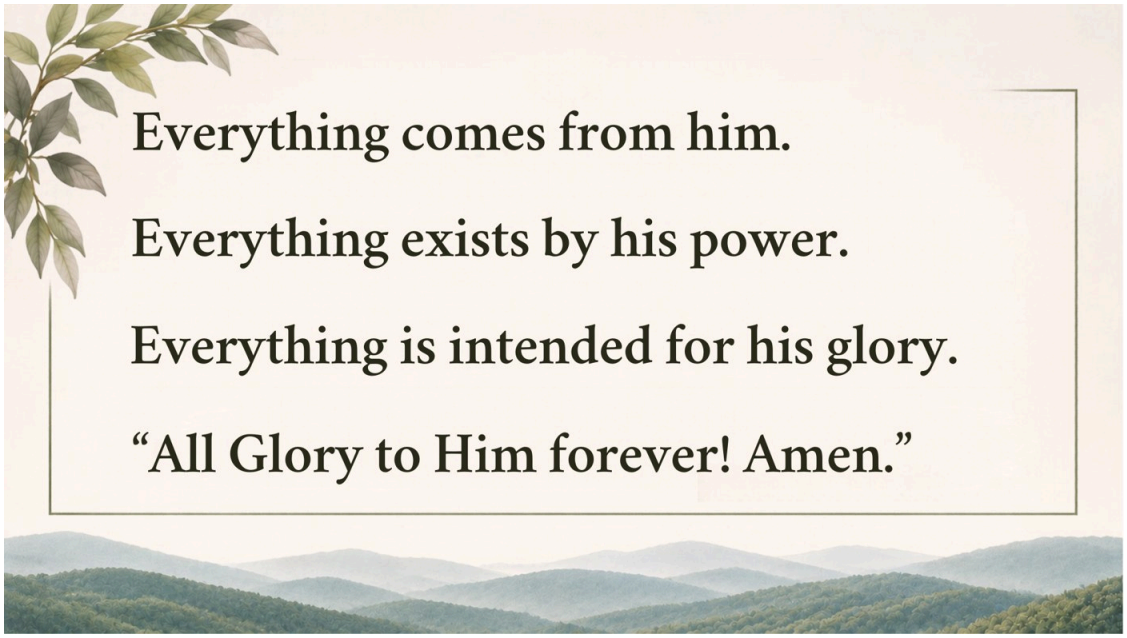


At the beginning today, I told you about the start of my week and said this message was for me.

When we don't understand what is happening around us… when things look bleak… when we're struggling to hold on to trust… when our emotions swing between hurt and fear… when present circumstances blind us to God's big picture… the Bible shows us that God can be trusted.

Romans 9–11 shows us that God is faithful, sovereign, merciful, loving, and just, and today we see that he is trustworthy even when we don't understand his ways.

And Paul closes this whole section not with an explanation, but with worship. **Verse 36**: *"For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen."*



Everything comes from him. Nothing in your life has slipped past God: not what you’re facing this week, not what I faced at the start of mine. None of it is outside his reach.

Everything exists by his power. He is holding you up right now, even when you can’t see how. The same God who is holding Israel’s future is holding yours.

Everything is intended for his glory. Your story does not end in the hard part. Just like Israel’s story, it ends in God’s glory. And if all the glory goes to him, there is no room for pride – for the Gentiles, for the Jews, or for us.

Which is why Paul ends with *“All glory to him forever! Amen.”*

So here is my invitation. As a sign of your commitment, or recommitment, to trusting God, would you stand with me if you’re able? Let’s read **verse 36** together, out loud.

BONUS CONTENT:

If you need more explanation on anything from today's message, please email **sermonquestions@ccleb.com**.

RE: Additional Perspectives on the Fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11:25–26) – Christians agree that Paul describes a partial hardening of Israel while Gentiles are being brought into God's family, but they disagree about how and when this period ends.

One widely held interpretation anticipates a future, large-scale turning of Jewish people to Christ after the full number of Gentiles has been saved. Douglas Moo, James D. G. Dunn, and Ben Witherington III understand the passage broadly this way. However, this interpretation does not necessarily require a pretribulation rapture. Paul does not explicitly mention the rapture here, and the timing of Israel's restoration relative to other end-times events remains debated.

Another interpretation understands the passage as describing God's ongoing work throughout the church age. As Gentiles receive salvation, their inclusion provokes Jewish people to reconsider Jesus as Messiah (**Romans 11:11–14**). On this reading, "all Israel" (**v. 26**) may refer to the complete number of believing Jews gathered throughout history, rather than a distinct future national conversion. Others understand "all Israel" as the whole redeemed people of God, Jews and Gentiles united in Christ. There is also disagreement about whether the "fullness" of the Gentiles means a predetermined number of converts or the completion of God's mission among the nations.

This last reading is often tied to replacement theology (supersessionism), the view that the church has permanently taken Israel's place in God's plan. For why we don't hold that view, see the notes from the replacement theology message. Not every Reformed interpreter takes this route, though: Charles Hodge and John Murray both expected a future turning of Jewish people to Christ.

Although these interpretations differ, Paul's central concern remains clear: **God has not abandoned Israel, Gentile believers have no reason for arrogance, and salvation comes through God's mercy in Jesus Christ.** The mystery Paul reveals demonstrates God's faithfulness to his promises and his wisdom in bringing salvation to both Jews and Gentiles.

Sources: Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, commentary on 11:25–26; James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9–16, pp. 679–681; Ben Witherington III, Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary, commentary on 11:25–26.