

Psalm 59:1-17 and Romans 11:25-32

11th Sunday after Pentecost. August 9, 2026.

Texts from the NRSVUE Bible. Suggested in *Un giorno una parola* lectionary.

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Psalm 59:1-17

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him.

¹*Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
protect me from those who rise up against me.*

²*Deliver me from those who work evil;
from the bloodthirsty, save me.*

³*Even now they lie in wait for my life;
the mighty stir up strife against me.*

⁴*For no transgression or sin of mine, O Lord,
for no fault of mine, they run and make ready.*

⁵*Rouse yourself, come to my help and see!
You, Lord God of hosts, are God of Israel.
Awake to punish all the nations;
spare none of those who treacherously plot evil.*

⁶*Each evening they come back howling like dogs
and prowling about the city.*

⁷*There they are, bellowing with their mouths,
with sharp words on their lips,
for "Who," they think, "will hear us?"*

⁸*But you laugh at them, O Lord;
you hold all the nations in derision.*

⁹*O my strength, I will watch for you,
for you, O God, are my fortress.*

¹⁰*My God in his steadfast love will meet me;
my God will let me look in triumph on my enemies.*

¹¹*Do not kill them, or my people may forget;
make them totter by your power and bring them down,*

O Lord, our shield.

¹²*For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.
For the cursing and lies that they utter,*

¹³*consume them in wrath; consume them until they are no more.
Then it will be known to the ends of the earth
that God rules over Jacob.*

¹⁴*Each evening they come back howling like dogs
and prowling about the city.*

¹⁵*They roam about for food
and growl if they do not get their fill.*

¹⁶*But I will sing of your might;
I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning.
For you have been a fortress for me
and a refuge in the day of my distress.*

¹⁷*O my strength, I will sing praises to you,
for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.*

On the Title of Psalm 59

The title sets the psalm in a specific episode of David's life: the night Saul sent men to watch David's house so as to kill him in the morning, from which David escaped when his wife Michal let him down through a window (1 Samuel 19:11-17).¹ The heading also carries three technical terms whose precise sense is debated. "To the leader" (Hebrew *lamnatstseach*) most likely designates the psalm for the temple's choir director or musical leader.² "Do Not Destroy" (Hebrew *al-tashcheth*), found in the titles of Psalms 57, 58, 59, and 75, is generally taken as the name of a melody to which the psalm was sung, though some have linked the phrase to Moses' plea in Deuteronomy 9:26, "Do not destroy your people."³ "Miktam," appearing only in the titles of Psalms 16 and 56-60, is the most obscure of the three; suggestions range from "inscription" or "atonement psalm" to a connection with the Akkadian *katamu*, "to cover," a sense that would fit a psalm concerned with hiding from assassins.⁴

¹1 Samuel 19:11-17.

²Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 32, on the term *lamnatstseach*.

³Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 33; cf. Deuteronomy 9:26.

⁴Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 19-20, on *miktam*.

Romans 11:25-32

²⁵*I want you to understand this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are: a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the gentiles has come in.* ²⁶*And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.”* ²⁷*“And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”* ²⁸*As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors,* ²⁹*for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* ³⁰*Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,* ³¹*so also they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy.* ³²*For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.*

Notes for the sermon

This text is distinctly Pauline in thought; this kind of argument does not appear in the Gospel narratives. Paul wrestles with the destiny of Israel and his own identity. He presents to the fellow church of Rome his own vision of what is going on in his world. As we know, he is specially fitted to do that, as a Pharisee, a Greek-speaking tentmaker, a Roman citizen, one called to be an apostle, a church planter. Paul presents a theological argument addressed to his original readers, and through them to us. We are all invited to make the effort to “understand” (v. 25). This is the NRSVUE translation. The Greek text has an ambiguous double negative, “not to be unaware.” Three tasks are needed: (1) to identify the original addressees; (2) to consider the intended meaning of the biblical quotations Paul draws on; (3) to follow the logical argument that leads to the conclusion, “God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (v. 32).

- (1) The letter to the Romans addresses a mixed congregation, but this passage speaks directly to its Gentile (former pagan) believers. Paul has just used the image of the olive tree (11:17-24) to warn Gentile Christians, grafted onto Israel’s root, against boasting over the natural branches, unbelieving Israel, that were broken off. The opening of our passage, “so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are” (v. 25), continues that same warning: the “you” addressed is the Gentile part of the Roman church, tempted to read Israel’s partial hardening as proof of its own superiority.⁵ The “mystery” Paul discloses is meant to correct exactly that temptation, not to satisfy Gentile curiosity about Israel’s fate in the abstract.
- (2) The scriptural warrant Paul offers in verses 26-27, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer... this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins,” is not a single citation but a conflation of two Isaianic texts, read in light of the new covenant promised through Jeremiah. The first half echoes Isaiah 59:20-21, where the Lord, as covenant-keeping Redeemer, comes “to Zion” for those in Jacob who turn from transgression; Paul’s Greek instead has the Deliverer coming “out of Zion” (*ek Sion*), a change many commentators read as pointing to the risen and returning Christ, whose deliverance now proceeds from the heavenly, not the earthly, Zion.⁶ The second half draws on Isaiah 27:9, “when I take away his sin,” in the same key as Jeremiah’s new covenant oracle, “I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin

⁵See Romans 11:17-24 on the olive tree and the warning against Gentile boasting.

⁶Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 730-33, on the conflated citation of Isaiah 59:20-21 and the shift from “to” to “out of” Zion.

no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).⁷ In their original settings both Isaianic oracles addressed Israel’s own future restoration after judgment; Paul does not alter their referent but insists on their futurity: the Deliverer “will come,” and the covenant promise still awaits its fulfillment for “all Israel” (v. 26), even as it has already been inaugurated for the Gentiles who believe.

- (3) My impression is that this passage is not really intended to be a theological statement in the sense of systematic theology. It is not, in my view, a statement about the doctrine of God and His agency. It seems to me more an effort by Paul to tell his readers how he sees the present story of revelation.

Verse 25 is not really clear in the NRSVUE translation; here is a literal translation. The logical structure of the passage is carried by its Greek connectives, which an interlinear reading of verse 25 brings into view: the disclosure formula (γάρ, “for”), the purpose clause (ἵνα, “so that”), the content of the mystery (ὅτι, “that”), and the temporal limit set on Israel’s hardening (ἄχρι οὗ, “until”).⁸

Greek	Transliteration	Grammar	Gloss
Οὐ	ou	negative particle	not
γάρ	gar	postpositive conj.	for
θέλω	thelō	pres. act. ind. 1sg	I want
ὁμᾶς	hymas	pers. pron., acc. pl.	you
ἀγνοεῖν	agnoein	pres. act. inf.	to be unaware
ἀδελφοί	adelphoi	noun, voc. pl.	brothers and sisters
τὸ μυστήριον	to mystērion	art. + noun, acc. sg.	the mystery
τοῦτο	touto	demonstr. pron., acc. sg.	this
ἵνα	hina	subordinating conj.	so that
μὴ	mē	negative particle	not
ἦτε	ēte	pres. subj. 2pl (εἰμί)	you may be
[παρ’]	[par]	prep. + dat. (disputed)	in the estimation of
ἑαυτοῖς	heautois	reflex. pron., dat. pl.	yourselves
φρόνιμοι	phronimoi	adj., nom. pl.	wise
ὅτι	hoti	conjunction	that
πώρωσις	pōrōsis	noun, nom. sg.	a hardening
ἀπὸ μέρους	apo merous	prep. phrase	in part
τῷ Ἰσραὴλ	tō Israēl	noun, dat. sg.	upon Israel
γέγονεν	gegonen	perf. act. ind. 3sg (γίνομαι)	has come
ἄχρι οὗ	achri hou	conj. phrase	until
τὸ πλήρωμα	to plērōma	art. + noun, nom. sg.	the fullness
τῶν ἐθνῶν	tōn ethnōn	noun, gen. pl.	of the gentiles
εἰσέλθῃ	eiselthē	aor. act. subj. 3sg (εἰσέρχομαι)	comes in

⁷C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 577-78; cf. Isaiah 27:9 and Jeremiah 31:33-34.

⁸Greek text of Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th rev. ed., ed. Barbara Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), at Romans 11:25 and 11:32; the reading παρ’ ἑαυτοῖς at 11:25 is bracketed there as text-critically uncertain. Glosses and grammatical parsing follow Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

Verse 32 seems to imply an agency of God that I am not sure is intended. Here is the translation of verse 32.

Greek	Transliteration	Grammar	Gloss
συνέκλεισεν	synekleisen	aor. act. ind. 3sg (συγκλείω)	has imprisoned
γὰρ	gar	postpositive conj.	for
ὁ θεός	ho theos	art. + noun, nom. sg.	God
τοὺς πάντας	tous pantas	art. + adj. (subst.), acc. pl.	all
εἰς	eis	prep. + acc.	into
ἀπειθείαν	apeitheian	noun, acc. sg.	disobedience
ἵνα	hina	subordinating conj.	so that
τοὺς πάντας	tous pantas	art. + adj. (subst.), acc. pl.	all
ἐλεήσῃ	eleēsē	aor. act. subj. 3sg (ἐλέεω)	he may have mercy on

I suggest that Paul's statements here are, in some sense, descriptive rather than prescriptive or a rationalization. What was actually happening in his time was the ongoing destruction of Israel as a nation, the preservation of the Israelites within the Empire, and the spreading of the knowledge of the God of Israel to the nations of the world through Christ. This is his interpretation of the "great commission," and a forerunner of the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is interesting to consider how this question is viewed from outside the church: does Christianity replace Israel? Two very different outside perspectives illustrate the range of possible answers. The Qur'an affirms Israel's original election in emphatic terms, "We did certainly give the Children of Israel the Scripture and judgement and prophethood, and We provided them with good things and preferred them over the worlds,"⁹ while also presenting Muhammad's revelation as God's final correction of a covenant people, Israelite and Christian alike, that had altered or forgotten what it was given; the Qur'an in this sense does not dissolve Israel's election so much as claim to supersede both Judaism and Christianity together in one further, final revelation. Maimonides, writing from within Judaism, answers the "outside" question about Christianity quite differently. He denies flatly that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies, yet he assigns to Christianity, and to Islam after it, a providential role in spreading knowledge of the Messiah, the Torah, and the commandments to nations that would otherwise never have heard of them: "All those words of Jesus of Nazareth and of this Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to make straight the path for the messianic king and to prepare the whole world to serve the Lord together."¹⁰ For Maimonides, then, Christianity does not replace Israel at all; it is instrumental to Israel's own still-unfulfilled hope.

⁹Qur'an 45:16, trans. Sahih International: "And We did certainly give the Children of Israel the Scripture and judgement and prophethood, and We provided them with good things and preferred them over the worlds." Cf. Qur'an 2:47.

¹⁰Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:4 (in the uncensored recension; relegated to a note, and renumbered 11:10-12, in many printed editions), quoted in "Maimonides on Jesus and Muhammad," *Jews for Judaism*, <https://www.jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/maimonides-laws-pertaining-messiah/>.

Maimonides's providential reading is echoed by contemporary Jewish voices as well. The American commentator Dennis Prager, for one, traces to Maimonides himself the judgment that Christianity's great historical service was to carry the Hebrew Bible to the nations, and explains why Maimonides drew a corresponding line between Christianity and Islam: "It was Christianity that carried the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Bible to the world. This was acknowledged by the greatest Jewish thinker after Moses, Maimonides;" and, on why a Jew may teach Torah to a Christian but not to a Muslim, "Christians believe Hebrew Scripture in toto to be the revealed word of God, whereas Muslims believe that primary text to be the Quran; for them, Hebrew Scripture is a flawed revelation."¹¹

The Christian church has traditionally held the opposite position: that Christianity supersedes and substitutes for Judaism, the "old" Israel having been replaced by the "new Israel" of the Church. A small but telling example of this supersessionism is liturgical: Sunday, not Saturday, became the church's day of worship and rest, the Lord's Day displacing the Sabbath. More recently, this traditional position has come under a significant, and in some quarters contested, revision. The Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* already insisted, in 1965, that "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures."¹² A 2015 Vatican commission document went further still, stating that "a replacement or supersession theology which sets against one another two separate entities... is deprived of its foundations," since "the covenant that God concluded with Israel has never been revoked."¹³ Protestant and Orthodox churches have undertaken comparable, if less centralized, reconsiderations; the question Paul raises in Romans 11 is, in this sense, still being actively re-answered by the church today.

Today the theme is dramatically present. Nazi Germany's attempt to destroy the Jewish people in the Holocaust (Shoah) of 1933-1945, in which some six million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime and its collaborators,¹⁴ did not succeed: within three years the state of Israel was reconstituted, proclaimed on 14 May 1948, "on the strength of... the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly," as "a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel."¹⁵ That reconstituted nation was attacked by its neighbors on the very day of its founding, and has fought for its survival, war after war, down to the present, most recently in the conflict triggered by Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.¹⁶ Paul's confidence that "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26) is spoken, then as now, not over a people settled and at rest, but over one still contested and still surviving.

¹¹Dennis Prager, "What Are Judeo-Christian Values?," Creators Syndicate, Feb. 23, 2023, <https://www.creators.com/read/dennis-prager/02/23/what-are-judeo-christian-values>.

¹²Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4 (28 October 1965).

¹³Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "*The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*" (*Rom 11:29*): *A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of "Nostra Aetate"* (No. 4), 10 December 2015.

¹⁴Yad Vashem, "The Holocaust," <https://www.yadvashem.org>: "The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators," carried out under the Nazi regime of 1933-1945.

¹⁵"Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel," 14 May 1948, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/declaration-of-establishment-state-of-israel>: "...we, members of the People's Council... hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel," on "the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly" of 29 November 1947.

¹⁶For an overview of the wars of 1948-49, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Arab-Israeli wars." On the war beginning in October 2023, see United Nations Security Council Resolution 2712 (2023), which calls, inter alia, for "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" following the attack of 7 October 2023.

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