

## **Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!**

Lesson Three +++ Romans 11

### **OVERVIEW**

Rom 9 In mercy God chose some Jews and some Gentiles to be his people.

Rom 10 In mercy God provided salvation freely for Jew and Gentile by faith, but the Jews rejected this free gift.

Rom 11 In mercy God used the fact that Gentiles accepted this free gift to lead some envious Jews to accept it also.

### **INTRODUCTION**

“How unsearchable are the Lord’s decisions! ... Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Rom 11:33a,34a)

✓ On what occasions might a believer speak words like these?

---

#### 11:1-4

1. Although his people Israel often rejected him, God did not reject them. In fact, he could not reject those Israelites whom he “chose beforehand” (Romans 11:2; Amos 3:2). See also Rom 3:3-4.
2. What two notable examples does Paul give in order to demonstrate that God has not rejected his people?
  - What makes the first example so striking? (1Timothy 1:13)
  - What makes the second example so memorable? (1Kings 19)

#### 11:5-6

1. There was also a “remnant” of faithful Israel at the time Paul wrote this. How had they been chosen?
2. “When God chose some Israelites to believe and be saved, God combined his grace with their good deeds.” Explain why such a statement is a contradiction.

#### 11:7-10

1. 11:8 God hardened many Israelites who rejected Him.
  - Looking at the original Greek: Instead of giving them (the Holy Spirit), God gave them “a spirit of deep sleep.” What was the result?
2. Recall that God “hardens” only those sinners who have already hardened themselves against God’s will. (Example: the Pharaoh of Egypt. Romans 9:17,18 & see Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12,34; 10:20,29; 11:10; 14:8.)
3. 11:9 God had once set a table filled with blessings for Israel, but now God would trap those who rejected him and destroy them. What is the “table” that became “a snare and trap, a stumbling block”? Recall Romans 9:33.

4. 11:10 “May ... their backs be bent forever.” Prisoners of war were forced to wear a heavy yoke. Slaves too. Those who reject God’s call will be forced to carry forever the heavy yoke of guilt and damnation. Does this make God unmerciful and unloving?

- Note: Keep vs7-10 in mind when you arrive at vs26.

11:1-10 **MAJOR POINT:** God has not rejected his people. In fact, he preserved a faithful remnant of Israel. He did this by grace and not because of their deeds. On the other hand, after many in Israel hardened themselves against God, he gave them “a spirit of deep sleep” and a yoke of slavery.

---

Background to Rom 11:11-24: By the time Paul wrote to the Romans, God’s salvation had come to many Gentiles.

Ac 13:44-46 -- At Pisidian Antioch: “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.’”

Ac 18:6 -- At Corinth: “But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”

Acts 28:28 -- At Rome: “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

---

11:11 Just as his prophets foretold, God brought salvation to the Gentiles in order to make some of the Israelites jealous.

Dt 32:21 -- “(The Israelites) made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.”

Rom 10:19 -- “Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, ‘I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.’”

11:12 “How much greater will their fullness be!” Can you follow the marvelous plan of God that Paul is explaining?

- (a) Some Israelites by grace believed in Jesus already and received eternal riches from God (vs1-6).
- (b) Many Israelites rejected the Gospel and were hardened against God’s call to faith (vs7-10).
- (c) So the apostles preached to the Gentiles, and many Gentiles by grace believed and received eternal riches (vs11-12a).
- (d) Now the Israelites, provoked to jealousy, would once again listen to the apostles and believe the Good News of Christ. So in the end, “the fullness” of physical Israel is that those Israelites who believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ will eventually have been joined by many, many Gentiles. Her numbers would become far greater than merely physical Israel could ever have provided!

11:13-14 Why did Paul think so highly of his ministry to the Gentiles and work very hard at it?

11:15 Explain these expressions:

- “their rejection”
- “the reconciliation of the world”
- “their acceptance”
- “life from the dead”

11:16 According to Numbers 15:20, offering the first-fruits sanctified the rest of the harvest. Yet what is meant by the “first-fruits” and the “root”?

- Possible: The “first-fruits” of Israel were believers like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were offered up as “holy” through their faith in the Lord’s Gospel promises. Now, as God carried out his plan, “all Israel” (v 29), both Gentiles and Jews, would be made “holy” by faith in Jesus. The picture of “root” and “branches” is similar.
- Better: Christ is the “first-portion” even as Christ is the “root.” While Paul has not used this imagery recently, he uses it elsewhere, as do other inspired writers. (1 Cor 15:20,23; Is 11:1,10; Rom 11:17-18; 15:12; Rev 5:5; 22:16; John 15:1-8).

11:11-16 **MAJOR POINT:** God has not given up on those Israelites who rejected him. Instead he brought many Gentiles to faith and gave them the riches of his grace so that the Israelites would become jealous. Then perhaps more Israelites would listen to the Gospel, believe, and be saved.

---

11:17-24 Paul pictures Gentiles as “wild olive branches” grafted into Israel the olive tree. See also v 24.

1. Based on what is said about it, what does “the root” represent? (Remember that the whole olive tree represents the people of God)
2. What is the Holy Spirit (through St. Paul) warning the Gentiles about?
3. At the time Paul wrote this many Jews did not believe the Gospel. Yet what is the Holy Spirit saying will happen to some of them?
  - Note: “Their own olive tree” = the church of all believers, consisting of Gentiles and Jews; the “spiritual Israel.”

11:17-24 **MAJOR POINT:** You Gentiles, watch out! Do not boast that you are now included in God’s church and the Jews are not. Just as you were once grafted onto God’s olive tree, someday God may break you off because of your pride and unbelief. On the other hand, God may still graft Israelites back onto their own olive tree!

---

11:25-27 Some Christians have used v 26a (“And so all Israel will be saved”) in order to further a false teaching. They use these words to say that eventually all the Jews will be saved.

- For instance, some “millennialists” claim that all of the Jews will be converted during the earth’s final days and that then Christ will return. Other “millennialists” claim that at on the Last Day all of the Jews will be raised from the dead and converted.

These false teachings overlook much of what Scripture teaches!

1. 11:25 At what point in time will the “full number of the Gentiles” have come in?
2. 11:25 So for how long will “part of” Israel be hardened against the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
3. What then does Paul mean by, “All Israel will be saved”?
  - a) Certainly not all physical descendants of Jacob (9:27; 11:14; 11:25b).
  - b) Possibly: All elect Jews and Gentiles together in one holy Christian church (Rom 9:23-24; Gal 6:16).
  - c) Probably: All the elect Jews, that is the believing Jews of Paul’s time (Rom 9:6; 11:5) plus the “hardened” Jews who later repented -- who became jealous, listened to the Gospel, and believed (Rom 11:11,14) and thus were grafted back onto the tree (11:23-24).
4. Again, to keep the Gentile believers from looking down on the Jews, Paul reminds them that God will continue to rescue Jews until the end of time. Yes, the Lord will continue to rescue Abraham’s descendants in keeping with the covenant he made with Abraham.

11:28 My paraphrase: “On the one hand, the Jews rejection of gospel led God to turn away from them and to save Gentiles. On the other hand, God loves the Jews because of his covenant of grace which he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So he will continue to call the Jews to repent and believe!”

- Looking at the Greek: Paul writes that God’s gifts of grace and his call to faith are ἀμεταμέλητα. That means that he will not “change his mind” and “take back” his many efforts to save the physical descendants of Abraham.

11:28-31 Complete the following statements.

1. The Jews were enemies of the Gospel for the sake of ...
2. Their disobedience prompted God to ...
3. This led some of the Jews to ...

11:32 The NIV here can be improved upon: “For God has confined all these to disobedience in order that he might have mercy on all these.”

- Earlier Paul wrote that God “handed over” Gentiles to the consequences of their sins (1:24,26,28). Here, though, it is the Jews. Yet God’s purpose ultimately is a redeeming one: to show mercy to both Gentiles and Jews when they listen to his Word and repent.

11:25-32 **MAJOR POINT:** God has decided to be merciful to the disobedient! At one time he showed mercy to you Gentiles after the Jews rejected the Good News. Yet he continues to be merciful to the Jews because of his covenant with Abraham, calling them to faith so that he might have mercy on “all Israel.”

11:33 God's ways are far beyond us!

- ✓ Looking at the Greek:
  - βάθος = the deepest part of the sea
  - “How unsearchable his decisions!” (ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα) The verb ἐραυνάω was used for plumbing the depths of the sea, something quite familiar to Paul's readers.
- ✓ What one point is the Holy Spirit making by saying these things about God's decisions and paths?

11:34 Rhetorical questions: Who of us could have planned what God planned, and who could have advised him?

11:35 God's mercy is evident in every person who is saved. No one can say that his salvation was payment for something he had once given to God.

11:36 All glory to God in all things, now and forever!

11:33-36 **MAJOR POINT:** We do not try to figure out the mind of God, for we will never be able to plumb the depths of his wisdom and knowledge. Instead we will give glory to him for all things, now and forever!

---

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout this chapter Paul marvels at the way God goes about bringing people to faith. Give some examples of how our marvelous God has done that with you or someone you know.