

GOD'S ABUNDANT MERCY IS EXAMINED

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

We believe all people are sinners and deserve God's just and holy wrath, but some are saved from His wrath, they are given God's mercy and will not be judged for their sins. Does God offer His mercy to all sinners or only to those that He has chosen to save?

When God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15), it is important to examine the context of God's statement to Moses (Ex 33:19) by reading Exodus 32-33. God was not talking about His mercy to those that He elected, but about His mercy to Moses and to those that repented of their sin in worshiping the golden calf that Aaron made. That is why there is no case against God for unrighteousness when He showed no mercy to unrepentant Israelites (v. 14).

Paul's conclusion, "So then it is not of him that wills, or of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy" (Rom 9:16). This causes some to believe that God shows mercy only to those sinners that He has sovereignly elected. They get that idea from God's love for Jacob and not Esau (9:12-13). Read the Study Notes for 9:12-13 to refresh your memory as to why God loved Jacob and not Esau.

Did God pour out His mercy only to those that He sovereignly elected? No! God poured out His "mercy upon all" sinners (11:32). The verse says that God concludes all (people) are in unbelief, so that He can show mercy to all (people). It is impossible to separate the first "all" from the second "all" and put them into two different groups of people. He has shown mercy to all people. Did not God so love the world (all people) that He gave His only Son so that believers could have everlasting life (Jn 3:16)? Paul exhorted us to pray for all people because God desires all sinners to be saved. He not only desired their salvation, but He provided for their salvation when He gave His Son "a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:1, 4-6). And John said Jesus "is the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2), not limiting it to elected sinners. God seeks all sinners and works alongside them to instruct them, to convict them, and to offer them His mercy. God elected those that He foreknew would receive His mercy.

God's Solution Will Be Received in Israel's Future – 11:1-36

I. Rejection of Israel Is Not Full – 11:1-10

11:1 — At the close of chapter 10, Paul quotes God as saying to Israel, "All day long have I held out my hands to a disobedient people" (10:21; Isa 65:2). Therefore, the question is asked, "Has God cast away His people?" Paul answered: "God forbid." He said that he was an Israelite and God saved him, so God had not cast away all Israelites. God was willing to save the whole nation of Israel, if they were ready to repent of their sins (Act 3: 19), to believe He gave His Son as a ransom for their sins (1 Tim 2:6), and to personally receive His shed blood as payment for their sins (1 Pet 1:18-19). God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). God did not forsake His chosen people; they forsook Him. God is waiting for them to come back to Him. Thousands of individual Israelites did come to Jesus after He ascended to Heaven (cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4), but the leaders of Israel remained hostile to Him and taught the Jews to hate Christ. The psalmist clearly said, "The LORD will not cast off His people" (Ps 94:14). The LORD told Jeremiah that Israel will cease to be a nation in God's sight when the sun, moon, and stars fail to give their light. Since the LORD has kept the sun, moon, and stars shining for more than 2600 years, it is absurd to think that Israel will be removed from His plans. The LORD also said, if the heavens can be measured and the foundations of the earth be searched out, He would cast off Israel for all the wrong they had done

(Jer 31:35-37). Since that cannot be done, it is proof that He will not cast away Israel, but will reveal His mercy to Israel and keep His covenant with David to make this little nation the greatest nation on earth (Jer 33:20-26; 2 Sam 7:16).

11:2 — Paul plainly states that God has not forsaken the people whom He foreknew (cf. Deut 7:6-9; Amos 3:2; Hos 13:5, 6). God elected Israel on the basis of His foreknowledge that this rebellious nation would repent. He knows what Israel will be like in the future. He made no mistake in His choice of Israel, so He will not change His plan. By God's mercy, Christ will return to save Israel from permanent destruction and will bring all twelve tribes into His Kingdom (cf. Ezk 48).

11:3-4 — Paul cited the example of Elijah to prove that God had not cast away Israel. Elijah was a prophet to the 10 northern tribes, called Israel. Baal worship was promoted by Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife. Israel's future seemed bleak and Elijah thought he was the only true believer left (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). But God corrected him by declaring that He had reserved 7000 believers that had not bowed their knees to Baal. God was merciful to save so many individual Israelites, even when their nation did not believe Him.

11:5-6 — Paul used this remnant of 7000 faithful Israelites to say there was a remnant of Jewish believers in his day that were saved by God's election and not by works. God's election of sinners is by His grace. No sinner deserves to be elected by God. But God's election by grace is preceded by His gracious offer of salvation. Christ gave His life to satisfy the holy demands for the sins of all sinners (1 Jn 2:2). His gift of salvation is offered to all sinners. It cannot be earned by works, but it must be received by faith. The faith of sinners is not an act of work that they have done, but it is an attitude of trust in what God has done. God does not compel sinners to receive His gift, but by His sovereign design, each sinner must receive His gift to be elected. Sinners that believe on His Son have everlasting life; sinners that do not believe His Son shall not see life, but His wrath remains on them (Jn 3:36). God's election of grace is determined by the sinners' response to receive God's gracious gift of salvation by faith alone. Paul distinctly stated this in Ephesians 2:8-9: "by grace are you saved through faith . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast." God has elected those that He knows will receive His Son. Paul said the process of our salvation begins with the foreknowledge of God, which enables Him to accomplish His purpose in electing those who are convicted of their sins and desire to be saved (Jn 16:7-11; Rom 8:29-30). His purpose is to make His whole creation know that He is God and that He alone is to be worshipped.

11:7 — "Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for; but the election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded" — Paul poses this problem to bring a conclusion to his discussion regarding Israel's status with God. Israel as a nation had not obtained the righteousness that they were seeking because they sought it by their works in keeping the Law instead of their faith in the finished work of Christ (9:32; 10:3-4). Jesus Christ is the only One Who kept the Law, so He is the only One Who could pay their penalty for not keeping the Law. Since they rejected Christ, they could not possess God's blessings and promises (9:4-5). However, the elected ones (the remnant that trusted Christ) obtained righteousness by their faith in Jesus Christ. As a nation, Israel was excluded because of unbelief. This unbelief caused them to forfeit their justification on God's terms and as a result they were "blinded" (hardened). This judicial hardening made them insensitive to any spiritual plea to receive Christ. They failed to call on the LORD while He was near (Isa 55:6).

11:8-10 — These three verses cite Old Testament Scriptures that give proof to divine judicial hardening. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent (2 Pet 3:9). Since God knows the hearts of all sinners, He knows which ones will finally repent of their sins and which ones will continue in their sins. He brings trouble into the lives of all sinners. Troubles soften the hearts of those that will repent and receive Christ as their Savior. Troubles harden the hearts of those that refuse to repent so they reject Christ as their Savior. But sinners do not know whether their hearts will be softened or hardened by the troubles that come into their lives. Those who keep rejecting God's offer of salvation are in danger of having their hearts hardened.

These verses declare that God's hardening of rebellious Israelites in Paul's day had a historic precedent (Isa 29:10; Deut 29:4). The eyes and ears of Israelites refused to receive the miraculous work of God and they continued in unbelief (Heb 3:7ff). It is dangerous to ignore God's message, because it can lead to divine hardening. In verses 9-10, Paul quoted David's imprecatory curses against his enemies (Ps 69:21-23) and applied them to the Israelites, warning them of God's sovereign hardening of those that will not repent. As such they are the enemies of God. They deserved no better treatment than the heathen.

"Alway"— This word does not necessarily mean "forever." It simply means that judicial hardening will last as long as the people remain in unbelief. So, Israel in Paul's day was judicially blinded (hardened) in unbelief.

II. Rebellion by Israel Will Be Forgiven – 11:11-24

A. Israel's Fall from Christ is Temporary – 11:11-15

11:11— "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" – Paul said for the tenth time, "God forbid." Israel's stumbling is not a permanent fall; it is a temporary fall. He is going to show that God has not cast away His people, even when Gentiles are blessed. It is true that Israel stumbled, but not to complete ruin. Israel's fall did two things: one, it provided Gentiles more exposure to the Gospel; and two, it provoked Israel to envy because they saw Gentiles were being blessed by the promises that God gave to them.

11:12 — Israel's sin of unbelief brought spiritual riches to the Gentiles. Israel's sin was accounted for in God's plan, but so is their repentance. Israel's present unbelief will change to belief after the Rapture of the Church. At that time a great number will be saved by faith in Christ. Israel's "fulness" occurs when Christ returns to set up His Millennial Kingdom in Israel. Christ will rule all nations and His Church, composed mostly by Gentile believers, will reign with Him (Rev 2:26-27; 3:21).

11:13-14 — Paul makes it clear that his distinct ministry is to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17, 18; Gal 2:7-9). He wanted the success of his ministry to the Gentiles to make the unsaved Israelites jealous that Gentiles were receiving the blessings from God that He had promised to them. He hoped that some Israelites would come to their senses and receive Christ as their Savior.

11:15 — God used Israel's unbelief and rejection of His Son to open the way for the Gentiles to be reconciled to Him. At first the Jews accepted Christ as Savior in great numbers, but the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem put a stop to it by persecuting the Jewish believers. Saul (later called Paul) was one of those Jewish leaders, but God knew that he would repent when Christ would appear to him on his way to Damascus to persecute more believers. He called Paul to be His witness to the Gentiles. His missionary trips took him to Asia Minor and finally to Europe where most of his converts were Gentiles, but a remnant of Jews was converted in the synagogues.

Israelites will begin to turn to Christ in faith during the Tribulation. We learn that 144,000 Israelites will be sealed early in the Tribulation (Rev 7:3-8). Also, many believers among the Jews will flee from Jerusalem to the wilderness in the middle of the Tribulation when they see the image of Antichrist (the abomination of desolation) set up in the temple court for unbelievers to worship him (Rev 13:11-17). God will protect these Jewish believers from Antichrist for 3½ years (Mt 24:15-22; Rev 12:6, 14). Again, Gentiles will be judged as to how they treated Christ's brethren (Israelite believers) during the Tribulation (Mt 25:31-46). Important leaders of Israel will repent when they see Christ as He returns to earth near the end of the Tribulation and they will be cleansed (Zech 12:10-13:1; 14:1-4). Then they will receive Jesus as their King. He will destroy His enemies and the Israelites will be blessed by God in their land with favor and prosperity (Zech 14:9; Isa 2:2-5; 65:17-25).

"Life from the dead" — When Israel receives Jesus as their Messiah (Christ), it will be like a resurrection from the dead. Gentiles were blessed with salvation when Israel rejected Christ and

was spiritually dead. When Israel is alive as a great nation under the rule of Christ, Gentiles will be blessed far more. They will enjoy peace and righteousness when Christ is the Ruler of Israel.

B. Israel's Break from Abraham is Restored — 11:16-24

God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham (Gen 12, 13, 15, 17 and 22), which is the root of the olive tree. This covenant with Abraham was confirmed to his son Isaac (Gen 26), and to his grandson Jacob (Gen 28); these three are the olive tree. The branches are the Jewish people. Some of them were broken off and branches from a wild olive tree, representing the Gentile believers, are grafted into the good olive tree. When Jews repent and receive Jesus as their Savior, they will be grafted into their olive tree.

11:16a — Paul will give further proof that God has not cast off His people. He used two illustrations to show Israel's relationship to God. The first illustration is a loaf consecrated to God, which was made from the firstfruit of a grain harvest. When the grain in that loaf is consecrated to God, the grain in the whole harvest is consecrated to God. This pictured Abraham, a man made holy by God, who became the father of Israel. Since Abraham was holy, the whole nation was holy (set apart). Not every tribe in Israel was holy, but the nation was consecrated. The next illustration will make this clear.

11:16b — Paul's second illustration is that of the root and branches of a tree. The root (and trunk) supports the branches. If the root is good, the branches are good. The root is Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham made him the Father of Israel (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:6-8; 15-18). We might think of the branches as the tribes of Israel plus the remnant of believers in Israel.

11:17 — "Branches be broken off" — The natural branches of Israel were broken off the root by their unbelief, which led them into idolatry. This took ten tribes into captivity by Assyria and two into captivity by Babylon. Only the remnant remained as branches in the good olive tree. After the captivity a few branches recovered until Christ came. Then all the tribes were broken off when they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. They demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus. A remnant of Israelites believed Jesus was their Savior and King by the preaching of the apostles. They remained in the good olive tree. The branches that are not broken off are the remnant that are true believers.

The Gentile believers that were from the wild olive tree were grafted into the good olive tree among the natural branches. They enjoy the blessings of the root, because Abraham is the father of all who believe (4:11-12, 16-17).

11:18-20 — "Boast not against the branches" — The Gentile believers were warned not to boast that they took the place of the branches that were broken off. They have no grounds for boasting. The Gentiles did not support the root, but the root supported them. Salvation was provided to them by God's mercy (Tit 3:5). It was preached to them by God's ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20). It was received by their faith (Acts 26:18). They had no reason to boast, but had every reason to be humble.

11:21-22 — Since God did not spare the natural branches who failed to believe, He will do the same to the Gentiles branches that fail to truly believe. Paul is not talking to individual people; he is talking to a group of people. There are churches that once believed the Gospel, but now they no longer believe it. At some point God cuts them off, but saves those that still believe (cf. Rev 3:1-4).

"Goodness and severity of God" — God is severe toward those families, churches, denominations, schools, companies, and countries that fall into unbelief, away from the faith that their parents, pastors, or founders had in God. This was the experience of Israel and Judah. God was patient with them, but He finally sent them into captivity. His goodness is toward those that maintain their faith in Him. This was the experience of Abraham and his family. He taught his family well (Gen 18:19). Not all remained faithful to God, but Abraham taught his family well. That is all parents can do. Each child will have to make their own decision for Christ or against Him.

11:23-24 — Israel is promised a future because one day God will graft them back into the good tree. God's sovereign plan in the Tribulation will allow Antichrist to persecute the Israelites so fiercely that many will repent of their unbelief and will receive Jesus as their Messiah (Jer 30:7; Zech 12:10). When they do, Messiah will defeat Antichrist and his False Prophet and He will cast them into the Lake of Fire and demolish their demon-led armies (Rev 19:11-21). God foreknew from the beginning that Israel would become a disobedient and contrary nation, but He also knew that the Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ would cause many of them to repent and receive Christ as their Savior and King. That is why He will not cast away Israel.

When Israel repents of their unbelief and turns to God in faith, it will be easier for God to graft the natural branches into their olive tree than it was for Him to graft a wild branch (Gentiles) into the good olive tree and produce good fruit. It is contrary to nature to have a wild branch produce good fruit when grafted into a good tree. The wild branch normally will still produce wild fruit. God had to do more work with Gentiles to make it possible for them as a wild branch to produce good fruit. Israelites are in a Covenant relationship with God through Abraham. Gentiles are brought into that Covenant relationship with God through Christ (Eph 2:12-13; 3:6). That is the reason why a wild branch (Gentiles) can produce good fruit.

III. Restoration of Israel Is Final (11:25-32)

God will show mercy to the Jews when they repent and receive Jesus as their Savior just as He has shown mercy to the Gentiles. He offers His mercy to all sinners. God's mercy will be demonstrated to all the world when Christ rules all nations in His Millennial Kingdom on earth (Zech 14:9; Rev 20:6). He will bring peace and prosperity, righteousness and spiritual riches to the people on the earth for 1000 years. After this earthly Kingdom of Christ is finished, the present heavens and the earth will pass away (Rev 20:11). The new heavens and new earth will replace the old (Rev 21:1). We are not told who will live on the new earth, but believers will live in the New Jerusalem that will come down from God out of Heaven (Rev 21:2; 3:12).

11:25-26a — Paul informs his readers of a mystery. A mystery is something formerly not revealed by God, but in His time, He reveals it to one of His prophets, who reveals it to us. The unveiling of this mystery reveals that Israel's present hardening will not continue after the fulness of the Gentiles ends. This will happen when the rule of the Beast (Antichrist) ends. All will be changed for Israel when this Satan-possessed man is cast alive into the Lake of Fire. At that time Israel will believe Jesus is their Messiah and will become a righteous nation.

11:26, 27 — "All Israel will be saved" – There are two ways to look at this promise. First, all the tribes of Israel will be saved. Not one will be missing in Christ's Kingdom (Ezk 48). Second, all who enter Christ's Millennial Kingdom will be saved; but the unsaved Israelites will be kept out of Christ's Kingdom and will be cast into Hell. So, all Jews that trust in Jesus, some from every tribe of Israel, will be saved. Not every Israelite will be saved because Jesus said all will not be true believers (Mt 7:21-23; 25:1-30). There will be no unbelievers in Christ's Kingdom when He establishes it on earth, but children who are born during the thousand years of the Kingdom will be unbelievers until they are born again as it is today.

The salvation of Israel is part of God's Covenant promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3). This Covenant is an unconditional Covenant and so its fulfillment depends on the faithfulness of God. Already, God has provided the Deliverer (Messiah), but Israel has not yet seen her need to be saved by Jesus Christ (Isa 59:20, 21; 27:9). Hence, Christ has a twofold ministry. First, He will turn away ungodliness from Israel (11:26; Mt 25:14-30) and, second, He will remove Israel's sin (11:27). These go hand in hand and are necessary prerequisites for Israel's blessing.

11:28, 29 — God's immutability (He does not change) is a guarantee that His covenant with Abraham regarding Israel will be fulfilled. That is, His gifts (God's promises to Israel) and His calling (God's election of Israel) are certain (Isa 48:12; see 9:4-5). However, at present, most

Israelites are enemies of the Gospel, so God's plan is to harden their hearts and turn to the Gentiles. He used their unbelief as the occasion to evangelize and save Gentiles. However, God will not cast Israel aside permanently. He will keep His promise to Abraham and they will be saved and greatly honored in the future.

11:30-32 — God concluded that everyone is a sinner, both Jews and Gentiles, so He could have mercy on **all** people. God shows partiality to no one, whether they are rich or poor, intelligent or ignorant, strong or weak, moral sinner or vile sinner, Jew or Gentile. He offers all people His mercy. It is not limited by a so-called sovereign election. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9) and He wants all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). And in this Scripture, it shows He has provided mercy for all people. How is God sovereign when He elects only a small minority of all those that He wants to save? How should His sovereignty be understood?

The answer seems to be in the way we view **His sovereignty in the election of sinners**. There are those who believe in the solo-sovereignty of God in electing sinners. He alone determines who is to be elected. Some have said that God will go so far as to drag sinners to Christ, if necessary, to save those that He has elected. It can be likened to a fisherman who hooks a large fish and drags it to his boat, while the fish fights to free itself. However, after they are saved, they no longer fight God, but thank Him for His mercy and sovereign power in saving them against their will. They say, "Who are we to question God's choices and why He has elected such a small minority of sinners?" But this scenario does not tell us why God has elected so few, when He shows mercy to all so all can be saved, and has the sovereign power to do it.

There is another way to understand God's sovereignty in the election of sinners. We call it the para-sovereignty of God, where He works alongside sinners to draw them to Christ. It can be likened to a tugboat that draws a damaged, helpless ship to the drydocks for repairs. "Drag" shows violent action whereas "draw" shows gentle action. These Study Notes have shown how the Father draws lost sinners to Christ (cf. Rom 3:10-12; 10:17). Sinners must hear and learn the truth that God is teaching them. He teaches them mostly, through His prophets and Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor 5:18-21) with the help of the Spirit (Jn 16:7-11). Sinners who receive the truth will receive God's mercy and be saved.

God's sovereignty and mercy shown to the people in Nineveh is seen in the book of Jonah. Assyria was a wicked nation and Nineveh was its capital. God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh to warn them that He was ready to destroy them and their city. Jonah delivered the message and the king of Nineveh and his people heard the message and learned it so well that they repented, and sought God's mercy. His mercy was granted so the city and its people were saved from destruction. We see from this that God's sovereign will works alongside sinners to warn them and teach them what He requires of them. If they can learn and turn from their wicked ways, they shall receive His mercy.

God's mercy is offered to all, so those that repent and receive Jesus will receive His mercy and be saved from His sovereign wrath (Mk 5:1-20; Jn 9:1-38; Act 16:25-34). But those that reject Jesus are like Judas and will be cast into Hell (Jn 6:60-66; 11:46; 13:21-30; 2 Thess 1:7-9). The para-sovereign work of God with sinners will allow them to turn from their sins and trust in Christ for salvation.

God's election of sinners takes His work and our will to accept it. Election is not determined by God alone. God's part in our election is to love lost sinners, to provide salvation for them, and to give His mercy to all believers (5:8; 6:23; 11:32; Jn 3:16). The sinners' part is to believe Jesus died on the cross to pay our sin-penalty and rose from the grave to justify us; to confess with our mouth that Jesus is God, and to call on His name to save us (4:21-25; 10:9-13). That is God's

sovereign plan for election. God has done His part to elect us, but now we must do our part to be elected. Many sinners have rejected God's Son as their Savior, so that is why many are not elected, even though God wants all sinners to be saved.

IV. Reverence for God is Fulfilled (11:33-36)

11:33 — This doxology concludes Paul's section on theology (Rom 1-11). He stands in awe of God's wisdom and knowledge, which includes a great amount of His foreknowledge. His wisdom devised a perfect plan that would allow Him to be just and yet justify sinners that receive His gift of salvation (3:26). God's plan involved the violent death of His Son by the hand of His enemies (1 Pet 1:18-20) and then the victorious resurrection of His Son by His sovereign hand. His Son propitiated His holy demands so any sinner that receives His Son as Savior will be reconciled to Him (1 Jn 2:2; 2 Cor 5:18-21). God's election is not mono-sovereign whereby He alone decides who is to be elected. Instead, it is para-sovereign by which He seeks to save sinners by His Son's death and resurrection so that those who will repent and receive His Son are elected (1:16-17; 3:26; Jn 3:16, 36). He chose to do it this way because He loved all sinners and wanted all to be saved, but He knew all sinners did not love Him. So, He let them make the choice to receive or refuse His plan for their salvation. His foreknowledge gave Him the ability to know the decision that each sinner would make, so He predestined (elected) those that would receive His gift of salvation. They would be conformed to the image of His Son. He also has called, justified, and glorified them (8:29-30).

His decision to let sinners accept or annul His gift of salvation created a monumental task for His wisdom and foreknowledge to solve. He had to make a plan so that His will is done on earth as it is in Heaven. This was a very complex task to solve. His foreknowledge of all decisions and actions of sinners from the creation of Adam to the last person to be born is mind-boggling. His wisdom took all this knowledge into account and He created a sovereign plan that would accomplish His good, acceptable and perfect will (Rom 12:2). This para-sovereign procedure will bring Him far more glory than a mono-sovereign plan that elects some sinners to be saved, but lets the great majority of sinners suffer the consequences of their sins in Hell with no genuine opportunity to be saved.

11:34-35 — God's thoughts and His ways are far above our ability to comprehend (Isa 55:8-9). He was fully competent to let sinners freely decide their destiny without losing control. Counsellors were not needed to assist Him (Isa 40:13). Nothing is too hard for our God to do (Jer 32:27). All He asks for our decision to receive His Son as our Savior to be elected. The other sinners will be lost.

11:36 — God is worthy of exclusive praise and glory for He is the source, the means and the goal of all things, which is evident in our salvation as it is revealed in Romans 1-11.