

## Romans 11

### *The Relationship of God to Israel in the Future: Romans 11:1- 36*

1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

11:1 As the apostle continues his line of reasoning in Romans 11, he asks a rhetorical question that demands a negative answer. "*Hath God cast away His people?*" The proper response is an emphatic, "*No! God has not cast away His people.*"

Paul is a personal testimony that racial Jews can become spiritual Jews by having the same faith as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "*For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin*" (Romans 11:1). As a regenerate Jew, Paul is not alone. He is just one of an elect remnant of grace that includes Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), Anna (Luke 2:36-40), Nicodemus (John 3:121), Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57-60), and many more. Racial Jews in every generation are being and shall be saved until the end of time. *God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew. (Romans 11:2)*

The repetition of the words "*His people*" is important to note because the scripture is very careful to define what is meant by *His people*. The "*people*" of God are those whom He foreknows (Romans 11:2 cf. 8:28-30; John 8:27,28),

that is "*on whom, from the foundation of the world, He had set His love. He had made them the object of His special delight, a delight beginning in eternity, continuing in connection with their conception and birth, and never leaving them*" (Romans, William Hendriksen). Because God has foreknown Israel, souls shall be saved.

2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,

3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to *the image* of Baal.

11:2-4 Additional proof for a present keeping of a spiritual elect of national Israel is found in the historical preservation of just such a group. The apostle argues that a parallel to the situation in the first century could be found in the time of Elijah. Having defeated the prophets on Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah entered into a period of personal depression when word reached him that Jezebel sought his life. Suddenly filled with fear Elijah cried out to God saying, "*I am alone and they seek my life*" (Romans 11:3b cf. 1 Kin. 19:10,14,18).

But Elijah was not alone for, “*what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*” The point becomes crystal clear. “*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5).* Within the nation of Israel in the first century, there was still, “*the election of grace*”. God had preserved faithful followers before in Israel He would do so again.

5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

6 And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

11:5-8 While national Israel has never obtained that for which she has sought—an election based upon the righteousness of good works—there is a spiritual election according to the righteousness of grace. (Romans 11:5-7)

The remnant which has have been elected according to the righteousness of grace has been allowed to see the glorious gospel of Christ while the rest of the Jews have been blinded to gospel truth. Who has blinded Israel? God Himself has administered this judicial judgment. (Romans 11:8 cf. Isa. 29:10,13; Deuteronomy 29:3,4; Isa. 6:9; Matt. 13:13; John 12:40; Acts 28:26,27)

9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:

10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.

11: 9-10 David, who prayed that God would destroy his own enemies, anticipated the presence of a divine judgment upon national Israel in a Messianic sense. (Romans 11:9,10 cf. Psa. 69) The point is established: when national Israel rejected God’s way of salvation by grace and entered into a system of salvation by works (Romans 11:7a) God rejected national Israel—but not totally. With tender mercy the Lord set His affection upon some and drew those individuals to Himself as a remnant of grace. The rest were blinded by God (Romans 11:7b) so that individuals might realize that, “*When men are saved they are saved by the sovereign grace of God, and when they perish, it is by the appointment of God, (Jude 4), through their own fault*” (Romans, Robert Haldane).

***No Final Fall: Romans 11:11-12***

11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

11:11-12 The first words of Romans 11:11, “*I say then,*” are the same ones used in Romans 11:1. The apostle uses this language to introduce a new section showing that the stumbling of Israel *as a nation* is not a final fall. In fact, the present remnant of a spiritual Israel serves as an earnest or down payment that the best is yet to come.

So strongly does Paul feel about this topic that he uses a strong expression to stop any thinking that the stumbling of Israel has resulted in a fatal future. “*God forbid,*” he says that such a concept should be considered.

What then is the purpose of Israel’s stumbling? It is this: “*through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy*” (Romans 11:11).

Two grand objectives are achieved through the fall of national Israel from the place of prominence in the visible plan of God.

First, there is a greater manifestation of Gentile salvation and, second, the Jewish nation is stirred up to jealousy as they see spiritual and material blessings being poured out upon the Gentiles—according to grace. (Note a historical case of jealousy in Esau, (Genesis 28:69)

Being stirred up, Paul believes the Jews will want to share in the grace of God. Matthew Henry hears the Jews asking themselves, “*Shall the despised Gentiles run away with all the comforts and privileges of the gospel, and shall not we repent of our refusal, and now at last put in for a share? Shall not we believe and obey, and be pardoned and saved, as well as the Gentiles?*”

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation [jealousy] *them which are* my flesh, and might save some of them.

15 For if the casting away [rejection] of them be the reconciling of the world, what *shall* the receiving *of them be*, but life from the dead?

11: 13-15 Lest the Gentiles be puffed up with their own spiritual pride at the unexpected blessings of God, Paul has something to say to them as an apostle and as a pastor. (Romans 11:13) First, Paul wants everyone to know that it is still his intense desire to provoke his kinsmen according to the flesh to jealousy that some of them might be saved (Romans 11:14).

Paul feels he can do this best by continuing to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. (Study Acts 18:6; 22:21; Romans 1:5; 15:15,16; Gal. 2:2,8; Ephesians 3:1, 8; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:17) So while he ministers to the Gentiles Paul hopes that some Jews might be saved. This hope was not without merit for it was grounded in God's promise that a remnant of Israel would be saved.

Second, Paul wants the Gentiles to understand that if national Israel is cast away in order that the world of the Gentiles might come to faith, that casting aside will not be final nor fatal. Indeed, the receiving of the Jews back into the Redemptive Plan of God based upon conversion is nothing but *life from the dead* for them. (Romans 11:15 cf. Isa. 26:16-19)

16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root be holy, so *are* the branches.

17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness [strength] of the olive tree;

18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

11:16-18 Two illustrations are used to further encourage the belief that Jews will be saved and received into the Church. **Firstfruit.** The first illustration is that of the first fruits. The apostle argues that "*if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy*" (Romans 11:16).

The historical reference is to the Jewish practice at harvest time of offering a sheaf (or cake) to the Lord on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Lev. 23:10,11 cf. Num. 15:19,21) This token offering acknowledged that the Lord was the ultimate owner of all the land's resources. The first fruits in particular belonged to Him but so did the rest of the ingathering. It was "*holy*" [i.e., consecrated] to Him.

Paul's point is that if the *first fruit* be holy (the separation unto God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), the lump (the covenantal promises) sanctified the rest of the produce and so some souls will be saved. But only some will come to faith. "*Though he [Paul] was such a powerful preacher, [though he] spoke and wrote with such evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, yet of the many he dealt with he could but save some*" (Matthew Henry).

**Holy root.** Not only is the lump holy, which produced the "*first fruit*", but next, the apostle argues, "*if the root be holy, so are the branches*" (Romans 11:16b). The root to which Paul refers is the covenantal promise made to Abraham of a spiritual seed. Matthew Henry notes that it is "*Not the root of communication, so Christ only is the root, but the root of administration, He being the first with whom the covenant was so solemnly made*" (Genesis 12:17). The branches are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Romans 11:28) Though some of the natural branches are broken off, some spiritual branches shall yet be grafted into their own olive tree. (Romans 11:24)

19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

21 For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee.

22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

11: 19-23 There are two questions that need to be considered.

**First Question.** “*When shall the natural branches [of individual Jews] be grafted in again to enjoy the root and fatness of the olive tree?*” (Romans 11:17b).

**Answer.** Immediately. At the present hour! Right now! From the moment of apostolic writing to the present hour.

**Second Question.** “*How is that response established? How can someone be certain that even now Jews will come to faith?*”

**Answer.** When Paul wrote to the Romans, God had already rejected Israel as a spiritually special nation. The reply of Christ to the disciples in Acts 1:69, was practically an admission that national Israel was in some sense no longer part of the covenant.

Though an exact moment of Israel’s Divine Rejection may not be pinpointed, the Divine Repulse was certainly anticipated during the earthly ministry of Christ. (Matt. 21:43) Following the resurrection, the Lord told His disciples to preach the gospel to all the nations of the earth. (Matt. 28:19-20) The Divine Rejection of Israel probably took place the day Christ was killed (Luke 19:41-44). Everything was different on the other side of Calvary.

The significant point is that when Paul wrote *The Epistle to the Romans* (c. AD 56-58) he was dealing with a present situation. In the Divine Economy, God had already officially cut off Israel as a nation to be entrusted with the gospel. Proclamation of the kingdom of heaven had been given to the Gentiles who were responding en mass to Christ thereby provoking the Jews to jealousy.

However, if the Gentiles did not continue to persevere in the goodness of God, if the Gentiles started to boast, God would not spare them either. They too would be cut off (Romans 11:21).

Furthermore, if Israel stopped abiding in unbelief, they would be grafted back in to the root of righteousness they had recently been cut off from, *for God is able to graft them in.* (Romans 11:23)

24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

11:24 To summarize the situation, in context Paul has been speaking about the rejection of ethnic Israel. He has said that Israel's repulse is neither total nor final for certain promises were made to the fathers that shall still be honored. Some Jews shall yet be saved. The evidence that God will honor His word of a spiritual seed to the patriarchs is reflected in the apostle's own salvation and the fact that if any Jew would stop abiding in unbelief they would be grafted back into the olive tree as a natural branch (Romans 11:23).

While God is dealing with Israel, the Gentiles must not boast of their new spiritual privileges for if they, "*were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these [individual Jews], which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree*" (Romans 11:24).

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

11:25 In the discussion of these great concerns, there is a great mystery that Paul does not want the Gentiles to be ignorant of. The mystery is that "*blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in*" (Romans 11:25).

The term *mystery* (Gk. *musterion*) does not refer to something that cannot be comprehended or understood, but something that has been kept secret, either in whole, or for the most part, in order to be presently revealed. (Romans 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:36,9,10).

Paul wants the Church of Rome to openly know that the present spiritual state of Israel is not their final condition. Their blindness is only *in part*. It will not last forever nor is it complete. They will be grafted into the Redemptive Plan of God because the Lord will bring about a restoration of His people to favor based upon regeneration.

Until the day of Divine restoration blindness [lit. hardness] "*in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in Romans 11:25*."

The word for hardness speaks of callousness or dullness. The Jews are under a Divine judicial hardening of the heart until all the Gentiles who have been ordained to eternal life come to faith in Christ. As soon as that full Gentile complement (pleroma) has come in, God will change His dealings once more with the Jews and so all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26).

26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

27 For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

11:26-27 The diversity of scholarly opinion in understanding this section by godly commentators should lead all Bible students to guard against two extremes. The first extreme is to build a system of theology in which national Israel and *not* the Church is the focal point of interest and love (Ephesians 5:23-27). The other extreme is to reject the possibility that national Israel may yet have a new role in its own redemptive history. What is certain is that all of the elect of all the ages shall be saved for the Divine Deliverer has come according to promise to *turn away ungodliness from Jacob* (Romans 11:26). What is also certain is that Israel did not recognize her King when He came.

The story is told of the good monarch King George V of England (1865-1936) who one day decided to visit a children's hospital. The young people were told of his coming but not all understood just what it meant or even what the king looked like. About 4:00 p.m. a rather plain looking gentleman made his way through the wards talking to the patients and then he left. When the visitor was gone and no one else came after a while, one little boy dared to ask the nurse when the *king* was coming. *But the king did come*, was the reply. *Don't you remember the nice gentleman who patted you on the head and spoke kindly to you and everyone else on the ward.* The little boy's eyes grew big as he remembered the man. *That was the king!* he exclaimed. *But he didn't have his crown on!* When Jesus came as the Suffering Messiah to Israel, He didn't have His royal crown on in a visible manner and so the nation did not recognize her King.

As a result, with wicked hands they took and killed their Sovereign.

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*"Hath He diadem as monarch  
that His brow adorned?  
Yea, a crown in very surety,  
but of thorns."*

28 As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are* beloved for the fathers' sakes.

29 For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

11:28-29 Having killed Christ, having been placed under judicial discipline by God, Israel in general and the Israelites in particular became the enemies of Christ, and enemies of the gospel message. (Romans 11:28a cf. Phil. 3:18) Nevertheless, Israel is still "*beloved for the fathers'* [i.e., patriarchs'] *sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*" (Romans 11:28b, 29). The gifts of God are irrevocable. The gifts of God are not to be recalled or to be altered. Paul reminds the church that the Jews are God's enemies because they have rejected the gospel, but from the standpoint of election they are His beloved.

30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

11: 30-32 Mercy is what both Jew and Gentiles need. Mercy is what all men need and mercy is what individuals can receive through Jesus Christ the Lord.

In the city of Verden, Germany there is a large church built many centuries ago. On one part of the stone facade of the building there is a lamb carved because of a true event. There was an accident while the Church was being constructed. A workman fell from a great height. He would have hit the ground and been serious hurt or even killed if he had not fallen providentially onto a sheep below. The lamb was crushed by the fall and died but the workman survived. He lived to tell the story and then he did something else. He carved a lamb on the building to immortalize the sacrifice that was made on his behalf. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God that was sacrificed for poor sinners. His redemptive work at Calvary is to be immortalized by every Christ who has fallen upon Him for mercy and grace. Come to Christ. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31)*. Salvation is a great act of Divine mercy.

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?

35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed [repaid] unto him again?

36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

11:33-36 Having argued for a present and future engrafting of ethnic Israel back into the Olive Tree of Righteousness according to God’s immutability (Romans 11:29) Paul breaks forth in praise of Divine wisdom and glory. He can do no less. Indeed all such contemplation of the outworking of the Plan of Redemption elicits a wonder at the Lord’s infinite mercy and grace.

It has been said that grace is for the guilty and mercy is for the miserable. But those who are guilty are also miserable. Sin makes men miserable. Mercy makes men hopeful. Though all have been placed in unbelief and helpless bondage (Romans 11:32), though all are full of guilt and shame, there is yet hope in God. The Lord God Omnipotent will yet come and deliver souls from the pits of human depravity *“as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11:26)*.

The Lord of Glory will give new hearts, and minds, and wills to worship Him. The Lord will yet have mercy upon those *“who have fulfilled the lusts of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3)*.

Why God is willing to show such mercy to desperate, depraved, despicable sinners is something that is unsearchable! His ways are beyond tracing out.

No one can trace the mindset or the methods by which God carries His plans into effect.

All that individuals can do is to kneel in gratitude and wonderment before infinite wisdom as it accomplishes the ends intended—the salvation of souls. *“For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor?”* (Job 15:8; Jer. 23:18; Isa. 40:13,14) *Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? (Job 35:7; 41:11) For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”*

Commenting on this final thought William R. Newell exclaimed, *“What a prospect for a redeemed sinner! In the ages to come—ages of worship without end, in which glory will be ascribed to God, and that with ever increasing delight! And the word of eager, glad heart consent ends it all: Amen. (Romans, Verse by Verse)*

In like manner, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse notes, *“No wonder Paul, the theologian and philosopher, sings. He insists in looking at God’s wisdom through the eyes of a sinner redeemed. For he has a part in this great cosmic drama of grace. He is a participant in this display of God’s wisdom. The unknown cosmic intelligences are merely observers of it.”*

## Study Guide

### Romans

### **Questions on Romans 11**

1. What is meant by “*his people*” in Romans 1:1?
2. What prophet from the Old Testament era illustrates God keeps in every generation a remnant according to the election of grace?
3. What did the prayer of David anticipate (Rom. 11:9-10)?
4. What mystery does Paul want the Gentiles to be aware?
5. What does sin and mercy do to the soul respectively?

### **Answers to Romans 11**

1. The “*people*” of God are those whom He foreknows (Romans 11:2 cf. 8:28-30; John 8:27,28), that is “*on whom, from the foundation of the world, He had set His love. He had made them the object of His special delight, a delight beginning in eternity, continuing in connection with their conception and birth, and never leaving them*” (Romans, William Hendriksen). Because God has foreknown Israel, souls shall be saved.
2. The story of Elijah reflects the fact that God keeps in every generation a remnant. Thinking himself to be the last of God’s faithful servants, Elijah had to be reminded he was not alone for, “*what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*”
3. When David prayed God would destroy his own enemies, he anticipated the presence of a divine judgment upon national Israel in a

Messianic sense (Romans 11:9,10 cf. Psa. 69).

4. The mystery is that “*blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in*” (Romans 11:25).
5. Sin makes men miserable. Mercy makes men hopeful.

### **Personal Application and Reflection**

1. Do you ever feel that you are in a Christian in the minority in the circles of life in which you move?
2. How do you feel about imprecatory prayers such as David prayed Rom. 11:9-10; Psa. 69:23)?
3. Is Paul’s teaching a surprise to you about who may consider themselves the true “*Israel*” of God?
4. Is it healthy for Christians to meditate upon and teach others about the “*severity of God*” as well as His goodness? Explain.
5. Write a brief summary of God’s dealing with national Israel in the past, in the present and in the future. Use *Scripture* for documentation of the points made.