

The Elect



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 10, 11.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Romans 11:1*).

This week's lesson covers Romans 10 and 11, with a focus especially on chapter 11. It's important to read both chapters in their entirety in order to continue to follow Paul's line of thinking.

These two chapters have been and remain the focal point of much discussion. One point, however, comes clearly through them all, and that is God's love for humanity and His great desire to see all humanity saved. There is no corporate rejection of anyone for salvation. Romans 10 makes it very clear that “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek” (*Rom. 10:12*)—all are sinners and all need God's grace as given to the world through Jesus Christ. This grace comes to all—not by nationality, not by birth, and not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus, who died as the Substitute for sinners everywhere. Roles may change, but the basic plan of salvation never does.

Paul continues with this theme in chapter 11. As stated earlier, it's important to understand here that when Paul talks about election and calling, the issue isn't one of salvation; the issue is the role in God's plan for reaching the world. No one group has been rejected for salvation. That was never the issue. Instead, after the Cross and after the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles, particularly through Paul, the early movement of believers—both Jew and Gentile—took on the mantle of evangelizing the world.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.

Christ and the Law

Read Romans 10:1–4. Keeping in mind all that came before, what’s the message here? How could we, today, be in danger of seeking to establish our “own righteousness”?

Legalism can come in many forms, some more subtle than others. Those who look to themselves, to their good deeds, to their diet, to how strictly they keep the Sabbath, to all the bad things they don’t do, or to the good things that they have achieved—even with the best of intentions—are falling into the trap of legalism. Every moment of our lives, we must keep before us the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness; that’s the surest way to protect ourselves from the kind of thinking that leads people into seeking their “own righteousness,” which is contrary to the righteousness of Christ.

Romans 10:4 is an important text that catches the essence of Paul’s entire message to the Romans. First, we need to know the context. Many Jews were “going about to establish their own righteousness” (*Rom. 10:3*) and seeking “the righteousness which is of the law” (*Rom. 10:5*). But with the coming of the Messiah, the true way of righteousness was presented. Righteousness was offered to all who would fix their faith in Christ. He was the one to whom the ancient ceremonial system had pointed.

Even if one includes in the definition of law here the Ten Commandments, it doesn’t mean that the Ten Commandments were done away with. The moral law points out our sins, our faults, our shortcomings, and thus leads us to our need of a Savior, our need of forgiveness, our need of righteousness—all of which are found only in Jesus. In that sense, Christ is the “end” of the law in that the law leads us to Him and His righteousness. The Greek word for “end” here is *telos*, which also can be translated as “goal” or “purpose.” Christ is the final purpose of the law in that the law is to lead us to Jesus.

To see this text as teaching that the Ten Commandments—or specifically the fourth commandment (what these folks really mean)—are now nullified is to draw a conclusion that goes against so much else of what Paul and the New Testament teach.

Do you ever find yourself proud of how good you are, especially in contrast to others? Maybe you are “better,” but so what? Compare yourself to Christ, and then think about how “good” you really are.

The Election of Grace

Read Romans 11:1–7. What common teaching does this passage deny clearly and irrevocably?

In the first part of his answer to the question, “Hath God cast away his people?” Paul points to a remnant, an election of grace, as proof that God has not cast away His people. Salvation is open for all who accept it, Jew and Gentile alike.

It should be remembered that the early converts to Christianity were all Jews—for example, the group that was converted on the Day of Pentecost. It took a special vision and miracle to convince Peter that the Gentiles had equal access to the grace of Christ (*Acts 10*; compare *Acts 15:7–9*) and that the gospel was to be carried to them, as well.

Read Romans 11:7–10. Is Paul saying that God purposely blinded to salvation the part of Israel’s population that rejected Jesus? What’s wrong with that idea?

In Romans 11:8–10, Paul quotes from the Old Testament, which the Jews accepted as authoritative. The passages that Paul cites represent God as giving to Israel a spirit of slumber, preventing their seeing and hearing. Does God blind people’s eyes to prevent them from seeing light that would lead them to salvation? Never! These passages must be understood in the light of our explanation of Romans 9. Paul is not talking of individual salvation, for God rejects no one group en masse for salvation. The issue here, as it has been all along, deals with the role that these people play in His work.

What is so wrong with the idea that God has rejected en masse any group of people in terms of salvation? Why is that counter to the whole teaching of the gospel, which at the core shows that Christ died to save all human beings? How, for example, in the case of the Jews, has this idea led to tragic results?

The Natural Branch

Read Romans 11:11–15. What great hope does Paul present in this passage?

In this passage, we find two parallel expressions: (1) “their [the Israelites’] fullness” (*Romans 11:12*) and (2) “the receiving of them [the Israelites]” (*Romans 11:15*). Paul envisioned the diminishing and the casting away to be only temporary and to be followed by fullness and reception. This is Paul’s second answer to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” What appears to be a casting away, he says, is only a temporary situation.

Read Romans 11:16–24. What is Paul saying to us here?

Paul likens the faithful remnant in Israel to a noble olive tree, some of whose branches have been broken off (the unbelieving ones)—an illustration he uses to prove that “God hath not cast away his people” (*Rom. 11:2*). The root and trunk are still there.

Into this tree the believing Gentiles have been grafted. But they are drawing their sap and vitality from the root and trunk, which represent believing Israel.

What happened to those who rejected Jesus could happen also to the believing Gentiles. The Bible teaches no doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” Just as salvation is freely offered, it freely can be rejected. Although we have to be careful of thinking that every time we fall we are out of salvation, or that we aren’t saved unless we are perfect, we need to avoid the opposite ditch as well—the idea that once God’s grace covers us, there is nothing we can do, no choices we can make, that will take the provision of salvation away from us. In the end, only those who “continue in his goodness” (*Rom. 11:22*) will be saved.

No believer should boast of his or her own goodness or feel any superiority over his or her fellow human beings. Our salvation was not earned; it was a gift. Before the Cross, before the standard of God’s holiness, we all are equal—sinners in need of divine grace, sinners in need of a holiness that can be ours only through grace. We have nothing of ourselves to boast about; our boasting should be only in Jesus and what He has done for us by coming into this world in human flesh, suffering our woes, dying for our sins, offering us a model for how we are to live, and promising us the power to live that life. In it all, we are completely dependent upon Him, for without Him we would have no hope beyond what this world itself offers.

All Israel Shall Be Saved

Read Romans 11:25–27. What great events is Paul predicting here?

Christians have been discussing and debating Romans 11:25–27 for centuries now. A few points, however, are clear. For starters, the whole tenor here is that of God reaching out to the Jews. What Paul is saying comes in reply to the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” His answer, of course, is *no*, and his explanation is (1) that the blindness (Greek *porosis*, “hardness”) is only “in part,” and (2) that it is only temporary, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

What does “the fulness of the Gentiles” mean? Many see this phrase as a way of expressing the fulfillment of the gospel commission, in which all the world hears the gospel. “The fulness of the Gentiles” has come in when the gospel has been preached everywhere. The faith of Israel, manifested in Christ, is universalized. The gospel has been preached to all the world. The coming of Jesus is near. At this point, then, many Jews start coming to Jesus.

Another difficult point is the meaning of “all Israel shall be saved” (*Rom. 11:26*). This must not be construed to mean that every Jew will by some divine decree have salvation in the end time. Nowhere do the Scriptures preach universalism, either for the entire human race or for a particular segment. Paul was hoping to save “some of them” (*Rom. 11:14*). Some accepted the Messiah, and some rejected Him, as it is with all people groups.

Commenting on Romans 11, Ellen G. White speaks of a time “in the closing proclamation of the gospel” when “many of the Jews . . . will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

“There is a mighty work to be done in our world. The Lord has declared that the Gentiles shall be gathered in, and not the Gentiles only, but the Jews. There are among the Jews many who will be converted, and through whom we shall see the salvation of God go forth as a lamp that burneth. There are Jews everywhere, and to them the light of present truth is to be brought. There are among them many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power.”—*Evangelism*, p. 578.

Take some time to think about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. How could a selective study of the Jewish religion help you to better understand your Christian faith?

The Salvation of Sinners

Paul's love for his own people is clearly apparent in Romans 11:25–27. How hard it must have been for him to have some of his countrymen fight against him and against the truth of the gospel. And yet, amid it all, he still believed that many would see Jesus as the Messiah.

Read Romans 11:28–36. How does Paul show God's love, not just for the Jews but for all humanity? How does he express here the amazing and mysterious power of God's grace?

Through Romans 11:28–36, although a contrast is made between Jews and Gentiles, one point stands clear: God's mercy and love and grace are poured out upon sinners. From even before the foundation of the world God's plan was to save humanity and to use other human beings, nations even, as instruments in His hands to fulfill His divine will.

Carefully and prayerfully read Romans 11:31. What important point should we take from this text about our witness, not just to Jews but to all people with whom we come in contact?

No doubt, through the centuries, had the Christian church treated the Jews better, many more might have come to their Messiah. The great falling away in the early centuries after Christ, and the extreme paganization of Christianity—including the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday—certainly didn't make it any easier on a Jew who might have been drawn to Jesus.

How crucial, then, that all Christians, realizing the mercy that has been given to them in Jesus, display that mercy to others. We cannot be Christians if we do not (*see Matt. 18:23–35*).

Is there someone to whom you need to show mercy, who perhaps doesn't deserve it? Why not show this person that mercy, no matter how hard that might be to do. Isn't that what Jesus has done for us?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Before the Sanhedrin,” pp. 77–79; “From Persecutor to Disciple,” pp. 112–114; “Written From Rome,” pp. 474, 475, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “Reaching Catholics,” pp. 573–577, in *Evangelism*; “What to Preach and Not to Preach,” pp. 155, 156, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Notwithstanding Israel’s failure as a nation, there remained among them a goodly remnant of such as should be saved. At the time of the Saviour’s advent there were faithful men and women who had received with gladness the message of John the Baptist, and had thus been led to study anew the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When the early Christian church was founded, it was composed of these faithful Jews who recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the one for whose advent they had been longing.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 376, 377.

“Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God. . . . As His servants labor in faith for those who have long been neglected and despised, His salvation will be revealed.”—Page 381.

“In the closing proclamation of the gospel, when special work is to be done for classes of people hitherto neglected, God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. As the Old Testament Scriptures are blended with the New in an explanation of Jehovah’s eternal purpose, this will be to many of the Jews as the dawn of a new creation, the resurrection of the soul. As they see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—Page 381.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As God’s law, and especially the Sabbath, comes into sharp focus in the last days, is it not reasonable to think that the Jews—many of them as serious about the Ten Commandments as Adventists are—will have a role in helping to clarify some issues before the world? After all, when it comes to Sabbath keeping, Adventists, in contrast to the Jews, are “the new kids on the block.” Discuss.
- 2 Of all churches, why should the Adventist Church be the one most successful in reaching out to Jews? What can you or your local church do in seeking to reach Jews in your community?
- 3 What can we learn from the mistakes of many in ancient Israel? How can we avoid doing the same things today?

From Cigarettes to Castles: Part 3

Whenever I have difficulties in life, God reminds me of the first steps of faith—to pray and rely on Him.

I'm now a small-business owner. I sell toys, and I have some bounce castles that are set up in various parks around the city of Vinnytsia. Every client who comes to our business receives a free Seventh-day Adventist magazine filled with good health and spiritual information.

The most popular days for people to go to the park are Saturday and Sunday. The central city park belongs to the city administration, so when my business does well, they receive a good percentage. But the challenge is that I don't work on Saturdays. In the beginning, we had some challenges with the city over that. They tried to force me to be there, but I was firm—either I don't work on Saturday, or I don't work at all. They could see that I was firm, and they could see that we worked properly. They appreciate our work and know that we are people of principle.

Sometimes I visit the cemetery where my mom is buried. As I walk past the graves, I see the names of my friends buried there. I'm especially sad when I see three names, because when I became a Christian, I talked with those guys. I invited them to come to church and to follow the path that I had taken, but now their names are at the cemetery.

The last time I was home, my wife was given the opportunity to see how horrendous my former life was. As we were walking, we saw some of my old friends who are still alive sitting on a bench. When one of my old friends saw me, he ran to me, fell on his knees, and started crying, saying, "I'm tired of the life I'm living!"

I told him that not long ago, on that very spot, I had told our friend, who was now in the grave, to go to church. And now I was telling him, "Go to church!" but he wouldn't listen to me either.

He said, "I'm going to have the same fate as the guy in the grave."

I pled with him, "It's much easier to go to church than to the cemetery. Look at me now—here are my wife and children."

He looked at them. "You can start a new life," I assured him. But he just turned back to his friends, back to drinking. He didn't have a family. He didn't have anything. He just spent every day looking for another bottle of booze.

As we walked away, my wife whispered, "Now I see what you used to be in the past."

"Yes," I whispered back, "and I was the worst one of them all."

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