

The Chosen



SABBATH—DECEMBER 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 10, 11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Did God turn his back on his people [the Jews]? Not at all! I myself belong to Israel. I am one of Abraham’s children. I am from the tribe [family group] of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1, NIV).

IN THIS WEEK'S LESSON, we will look at Romans 10 and 11. We shall give special attention to chapter 11. It is important to read over both chapters first before trying to make sense of Paul’s words.

Romans 10 and 11 have been, and continue to be, the center of much discussion. But two important ideas are made clear to us in these two chapters: (1) God’s love is for everyone and (2) God wishes to see everyone saved. God does not reject any group of people as not worth saving. Paul makes this truth very clear: “There is no difference between the Jews and the people who are not Jews” (Romans 10:12, NIV). Indeed, all people are sinners. Everyone needs God’s saving power. God gives His saving power to everyone who believes in Jesus. God does not give us His saving power because of where we were born or because of the works we do.

Paul also talks about the people God chooses. Paul is not talking about who is saved or not saved. Instead, Paul means the people that God chooses to work with Him. Again, God never chose to save some people and not others. Paul never meant that. Instead, Paul is talking about the people God chooses to work with Him to reach everyone on the earth with the Good News that Jesus saves humans from sin.



We help God reach the whole world with the Good News that Jesus saves us from our sins.

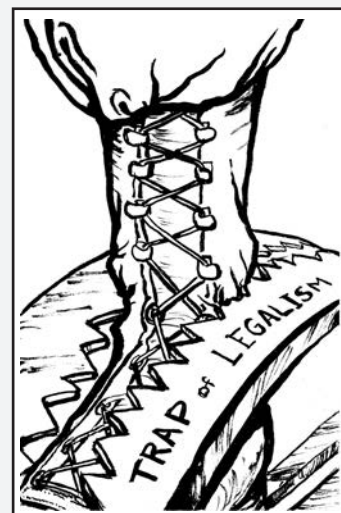
CHRIST AND THE LAW (Romans 10:1–4)

What is the message of Romans 10:1–4? How are we in danger of trying to get right with God in our own power instead of accepting God’s power to make us right with Him?

Another name for trying to save yourself by being good and by doing good works is legalism. There are many different kinds of legalism. Legalism can include the act of trying to save ourselves by (1) doing good works, (2) eating healthy food, (3) keeping the Sabbath, (3) avoiding evil, (4) and being a success in our work for God. All of these things are good. But people who do these things to save themselves have fallen into the trap of legalism. Every minute of our lives, we must remember that God is holy and that we are full of sin. This truth is the best way to protect ourselves from trying to make ourselves right with God by our own good behavior. We are not good on our own. So, when we try to be made right with God by our good behavior, we go against God’s way of making us right with Him. God’s way is only by faith in Jesus and the things Jesus did for us.

Romans 10:4 is an important verse. We find in it the meaning of all of Paul’s message to the Romans. But to understand Romans 10:4, we need to understand the meaning of the verses around it first. Many Jews “tried to get right with God in their own way” (Romans 10:3, NIV). These Jews tried to be “made right by following the law” (Romans 10:5, ICB). But then God sent Jesus to this earth. Jesus came to show us the only way that we can be made right with God. God’s gift of making us right with Him is named God’s righteousness. God offered His righteousness to everyone who would put his or her faith in Jesus.

Now, let us say that the “law” in Romans 10:5 includes the Ten Commandments. Our saying that does not mean that the Ten Commandments were thrown out. The Ten Commandments also are named the moral law. The moral law points out our sin. The moral law shows us our need of a Savior and our need to be made right with God. All these things are found only in Jesus. So, in this way, Jesus “has put an end to the law” (Romans 10:4, NIV). The law led us to Jesus and to Jesus’ power to make us right with God. The Greek word for “end” here is *telos*. *Telos* also can be written as “purpose.” The law is meant to lead us to Jesus.



People who try to be saved by their good behaviors fall into the trap of legalism.

CHOSEN BY GOD'S LOVING-FAVOR (Romans 11:1–7)

Read Romans 11:1–7. What teaching do these verses show to us very clearly?

Paul asks the question, “Did God turn his back on his people [the Jews]?” (Romans 11:1, NIV). In answer, Paul points to a remnant. You will remember from past lessons that a remnant is a small piece of cloth left over from a larger roll of cloth. This small piece of cloth is a symbol for the Jews in whom God continues to work. The remnant is chosen by God’s loving-favor. The remnant is proof that God has not thrown away the Jews. Indeed, all people have the chance to be saved.

We need to remember that the first Christians were all Jews. There was the group of Jews who accepted the Good News about Jesus on the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost was the special time when God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ believers shortly after Jesus went back to heaven (read Acts 2:1–4). Thousands of people accepted Jesus at that time. But the first Jewish Christians had trouble believing that God meant for everyone to be saved. As a matter of fact, God had to convince Peter in a special vision and by a miracle that people who were not Jews also could have God’s loving-favor (Acts 10; read also Acts 15:7–10).



Paul uses a word picture to show that God gives Israel hearts and minds that wanted to sleep and eyes and ears that could not see or hear God. Paul uses this word picture to show us the part God chooses for people to have in His work.

Read Romans 11:7–10. Paul says that some Jews “refused to listen to God” (Romans 11:7, ICB). So, God “‘closed their eyes so they could not see’ ” (Romans 11:8, ICB). Does Paul mean that God “made it hard” for the ones who rejected Jesus “to understand” (Romans 11:8, NIV)? Why is that idea wrong?

In Romans 11:8–10, Paul uses several Old Testament verses. The Jews believed the Old Testament had the power to guide their lives. The verses Paul points to use a word picture to show God giving Israel hearts and minds that wanted to sleep, and eyes and ears that could not see or hear the things God said. Does God “blind” people’s minds to stop them from “seeing” truth that would lead them to choose to be saved? Never! So, we must understand that the word pictures in these verses mean the same thing that Romans 9 means. Paul is not talking about the people who are saved or lost here. Instead, Paul is talking about the part God chooses for people to have in His work.

THE NATURAL BRANCHES (Romans 11:16–24)

Read Romans 11:11–15. What wonderful hope does Paul in these verses offer to the Jews?

In Romans 11:11–15, we find two sets of wordings that are almost the same in meaning and in the way they are written. The first wording is “when all Israel turns to God” (Romans 11:12, NIV) or “their full return [coming back]” to God (CEV). The second wording is “when they [the people of Israel] are also gathered in” (Romans 11:15, NIV). What is Paul talking about here? The wordings show that the people of Israel had not fallen away from God forever. In fact, Paul saw that their falling away from God would last for only a limited amount of time. Then their falling away would be followed by their fully turning to God. Here is Paul’s second answer to the question asked at the beginning of Romans 11. You will remember his question was, “Did God throw out His people?” Paul’s answer is “No.” One day God will gather His people back to Him.

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

Paul shows us that the Jews who stay loyal to God are the same as a good olive tree. Some branches of this good olive tree were broken off. Those broken branches are a symbol of the Jews who do not believe in Jesus. Paul uses this word picture to prove that God did not “throw out His people” (Romans 11:2, ICB). The good olive tree is missing some of its branches. But its root and trunk are alive.

God put the non-Jewish believers into the place where the bad branches were broken off. These new branches now pull sap and life from the root and trunk. The root and trunk are a word picture for loyal Israel.

What happened to the Jews who rejected Jesus also could happen to the non-Jewish believers. The Bible never teaches the idea of “once saved, always saved.” Instead, we can reject God’s gift of saving us as easily as we accept this gift. Now, we must be careful not to think that every time we sin we are no longer saved. We also must not think we cannot be saved unless we are without sin. But we also need to avoid thinking that we could never turn away from God again either. In the end, only the people who “continue to live in [God’s] kindness” (Romans 11:22, NIV) will be saved.



The good olive tree may be missing some of its branches. But its root and trunk still live.

ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED (Romans 11:25–27)

As shown in Romans 11:25–27, what powerful miracle does Paul say will take place among the Jews in the future?

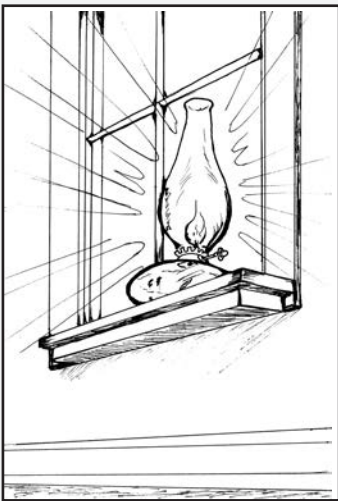
Christians have argued over the meaning of Romans 11:25–27 for hundreds of years. But a few facts are clear. These verses tell us that God is reaching out to the Jews. What Paul says here is the answer to the question he asked at the beginning of the chapter: “Did God turn his back on his people [the Jews]?” (Romans 11:1, NIV). Paul’s answer is, Of course not! Paul gives two reasons why: (1) the spiritual blindness of the Jews (Romans 11:8) will last only a short time. The wording “‘eyes that could not see’” comes from the Greek word *porosis*. *Porosis* means “being hard.” The Jews’ “blindness” lasts only for a limited time. Indeed, the Jews’ blindness will end when “the right amount of people who are not Jews come to God” (Romans 11:25, NIV).

What does this verse mean? Many people believe this verse points to the time when the Good News about Jesus will have been preached everywhere. And the coming of Jesus will be near. Then many Jews will come to Jesus.

Another set of words that is difficult to understand is “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26, NIV). We must not think this wording means that every Jew will be saved at the end of time by a special command from God. Nowhere does the Bible teach universalism. Universalism is the idea that all humans will be saved. But Paul hoped that “some [of the Jews would] be saved” (Romans 11:14, NIV).

Ellen G. White shares her thoughts on Romans 11. She points to a time “when the work of announcing the Good News to all people of the earth is almost done.” At this time, “many of the Jews . . . will by faith receive Jesus as their Savior.”—*The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 381, adapted.

Ellen G. White also says: “Many Jews will accept Jesus. These Jews will be made right with God. We will see God’s loving-favor save these Jews. The truth for these times must be brought to Jews everywhere. This truth will shine to the Jews as a bright lamp shines. Then many Jews will receive the truth. With great power, they will announce that God’s law does not change.”—*Evangelism [Spreading the Good News About Jesus Everywhere]*, page 578, adapted.



“God’s loving-favor will shine as a bright lamp to the Jews.”

GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS TOWARD SINNERS (Romans 11:28–36)

Paul's love for his own people is clearly shown in Romans 11:25–27. It must have been very hard for Paul to have some of his own people fighting against him and against the truth about Jesus. But Paul hoped that many of his people would accept Jesus as the One whom God chose to save them.

Read Romans 11:28–36. As shown in these verses, how does Paul show that God's love is not just for the Jews? How does Paul describe the amazing and strange power of God's grace? God's grace, or loving-favor, is His gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. This power is strange because it is a mystery. We cannot fully understand how wonderful it is.

One important idea comes across clearly in Romans 11:28–36. God pours out His mercy, love, and grace on sinners. God made a plan to save all humans. God made this plan even before He made the earth. God's plan to save everyone included His working with humans and nations.

Ask God to help you understand Romans 11:31. What important idea should we take from this verse? What does this idea tell us about how we should witness to the Jews and to everyone we meet?

No doubt the Christian church could have been kinder to the Jews. Then many more Jews might have accepted Jesus. Many awful things happened in the church in the first few hundred years after Jesus. What were some of the awful things that happened? (1) The church fell away from the truth and (2) worship on the Seventh-day was changed to Sunday. These and other things did not make it easy for a Jew who felt led to follow Jesus.

It is very important for all Christians to understand that they must show to others the mercy God shows them. God shows us this mercy when we accept Jesus. We cannot be Christians if we do not show this same mercy to others (read Matthew 18:23–35).

Is there someone you need to show mercy to? What if this person has done nothing to be worthy of your mercy? Why not show this person mercy anyway? After all, Jesus showed mercy to us.



Christians must show to other people the mercy that God shows to them.



“Many Jews will see in Jesus the Savior of the world.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Israel failed to do the work that God gave them to do as a country. But there was a large number of the Jews who would be saved. At the time of the Savior’s first coming, there were loyal men and women who gladly accepted John the Baptist’s message. This message led these Jews to study again the special messages from God about His Chosen One. After this time, the early Christian church got started. And this church was made up of these loyal Jews who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the One they had been waiting for.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, pages 376, 377, adapted.

“There are many Jews who know a lot about the Bible. Saul of Tarsus was one of these Jews. These Jews will announce with wonderful power the truth that the law of God never changes and lasts forever. . . . God’s servants must work in faith for the Jews who have been hated for too long and have not been given enough attention or care. God’s plan of saving sinners will be shown to the Jews.

“God needs His messengers to take special interest in the Jewish people everywhere. The Old Testament truths will be blended with the truths of the New to explain God’s plan to save sinners. Then many of the Jews will understand God’s plan to save them as they never understood God’s plan before. This understanding will give new life to their spirits. They will see Jesus in the Old Testament. These Jews will see how clearly the New Testament explains the Old. Then the sleeping minds of these Jews will awake to the truth. They will see that Jesus is the Savior for the whole earth. Then many Jews will by faith accept Jesus as the One who pays the price for their sins and frees them from death.”—*The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 381, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God’s law is as important to many Jews as it is to Adventists. As we near the end of time, what part might the Jews have in the work of showing the importance of the law and the Sabbath to all people of the earth?
- ② Of all churches, why should the Adventist Church be the most successful in reaching out to Jews? What can you or your local church do to reach Jews?
- ③ What can we learn from the mistakes of Israel in Bible times? How can we avoid making their same mistakes?