

Children of the Promise



SABBATH—DECEMBER 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 9.

MEMORY VERSE: “So God does what he wants to do. He shows mercy to one person and makes another [person] stubborn” (Romans 9:18, NIV).

“**THE HOLY WRITINGS** say, ‘I [God] loved Jacob, but hated Esau.’ . . . God said to Moses, ‘I will have . . . loving-pity for anyone I want to’ ” (Romans 9:13, 15, NIV).

How should we understand Paul’s words in Romans 9:13, 15, and 18? What about the freedom that humans have to choose? We are free to choose God or reject Him, right? Or, do these verses teach us that God chooses to save some people, while He chooses not to save other people, even if those people choose to be saved?

Paul says that God can pick any person or people to be His “chosen” people. After all, God is in charge of the work of telling everyone on the earth about the Good News. So, God can choose anyone He wants to do this work. What is more, God cuts off no one from being saved. God can choose anyone He wants to serve Him. God’s choice does not go against our freedom to choose. In fact, God gives every person the power to choose. More important, God’s choice does not go against the truth that He wants everyone to be saved.

So, we remember that Romans 9 is not discussing who is saved or not. Instead, Romans 9 is talking about the fact that God chose certain people to do a special work for Him.



Romans 9 is not talking about people who are saved or not saved. Instead, Romans 9 talks about the fact that God chose some people to do a special work for Him.

PAUL'S DEEP SORROW (Romans 9:1–12)



God continues to work through some who remain Jews. This group of Jews is called a remnant. A remnant is a small piece of cloth left over from a larger roll of cloth. This small piece is a word picture for the Jews that God continues to work with.

“ ‘ “You will be to Me a nation [country] of religious leaders, a holy nation.” These are the words you will speak to the people of Israel’ ” (Exodus 19:6, NVL).

God needed a people who would tell other people about the Good News. At that time, many people on the earth were worshiping false gods and bowing down to statues. Spiritual darkness was everywhere on the earth. God chose the Israelites to share the Good News. God showed Israel His love. God planned for Israel to become an example to other nations. God wanted Israel to lead those nations to Him. The animals offered for the sins of the people in the Jewish plan of worship would point everyone on earth to look to Jesus to save them. God planned for Israel to grow larger and larger. Then God would bless Israel more and more. God wanted Israel to spread out until their kingdom included all the people on the earth.

We fail God all the time. But what important idea is Paul sharing in Romans 9:1–12 about God’s loyalty to us?

Paul shows us in these verses that the promise made to Israel had not failed completely. God continues to work in some who are Jews. Another name for this group of Jews is a remnant. A remnant is a small piece of cloth left over from a larger roll of cloth. This small piece is a symbol for the Jews in whom God continues to work. Paul proves that the idea about a remnant is very important. Paul points to Israel’s history to show us that God always chooses carefully the people who help Him do His work on earth. We see that (1) God did not choose all the children of Abraham to join in His special agreement, only Isaac’s children. (2) God did not choose all of Isaac’s children, only Jacob’s.

What God’s choice shows us is that we are not saved because of who our ancestors are. You can come from the right family and belong to the right church, and be lost anyway. But faith shows us who is “born because of God’s promise” (Romans 9:8, NVL). We show this faith to other people when we love them.

Read Romans 9:6. What important message can we find in this verse for ourselves as Adventists?

CHOSEN (Romans 9:12, 13)

"It is written, 'I chose Jacob instead of Esau' (Malachi 1:2, 3)" (Romans 9:12, 13, NIV).

We said earlier in the introduction to this week's lesson that it is impossible to understand the meaning of Romans 9 until we first understand that Paul is not talking about the people God "chose" to save. Instead, Paul uses the word "chose" to mean the special work that God chooses some people to do. God chose Jacob to be the father of the people who would be God's special group of witnesses to everyone on the earth. So, there is no hint at all in these verses in Romans that Esau could not be saved. God wanted Esau to be saved as much as He wants everyone to be saved.

Read Romans 9:14, 15. How do the ideas in these verses connect with everything we just read?

Again, we must understand that Paul is not talking about who is saved or not saved. God offers His mercy to everyone. Indeed, "He wants all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4, NIV). "God offers to save all people" (Titus 2:11, NIV). God can choose whole countries to have an important part in His work. Of course, these countries are free to refuse being a part of God's work. But these countries cannot stop God's choice from happening. So, this fact tells us that Esau could never be the person that the Savior would come from. And Esau never could have been the father of the chosen people.

In the end, God did not choose to shut Esau out from heaven for no reason. God's gift of making us right with Him is free to everyone. God chose everyone to be saved, not lost (Ephesians 1:4, 5; 2 Peter 1:10). It is our own choices, and not God's, that stop us from having everlasting life. Jesus died for every human. At the same time, God tells us in the Bible what we must do to have everlasting life: we must have faith in Jesus. Our faith leads to our being made right with God and to a life of obedience.

Of all the awful things that could happen, why would the worst thing of all be letting sin, self, and our evil desires steal from us everything God promises us in Jesus?



God's gift of making sinners right with Himself is free to all people on the earth.

MYSTERIES (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and My ways are not your ways,’ says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8, NVI). “‘Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, my thoughts and my ways are higher than yours’” (Isaiah 55:9, CEV).

Read Romans 9:17–24. Think about what we have read so far. With that in mind, how should we understand Paul’s message to us in Romans 9:17–24?

God meant for His act of freeing Israel from Egypt to be an example to everyone on the earth of His plan to free humans from sin and death. God did many miracles in Egypt before freeing His people from slavery. These powerful works were meant to show the Egyptians and the other nations around them that the God of Israel was indeed the true God. And these works were meant to be an invitation for these nations to stop worshiping their false gods and to come worship Him.

Clearly, the king of Egypt already made his choice against God. The king of Egypt was known as the Pharaoh. God made Pharaoh’s heart hard and stubborn. But God did not take away from Pharaoh the chance to be saved. Instead, God made Pharaoh stubborn so that Pharaoh would not let Israel go free. God turned Pharaoh’s heart against letting Israel go. But God did not turn Pharaoh’s heart against wanting to be saved. After all, Jesus died for Pharaoh, just as He died for Moses, Aaron, and all the children of Israel.

The important idea for us to take away from our reading of Romans 9 is that we have a limited understanding of God and how He works on earth and in our lives. So, how can we expect to understand all of God’s ways when nature holds mysteries we cannot understand? After all, it was only in the past 171 years that doctors learned it might be a good idea to wash their hands before operating! And who knows what other things we might learn about in the future that will show just how little we know today?

We do not always understand God’s ways. But Jesus came to show us God (John 14:9). So, how can knowing who God is help us to stay loyal to Him during times of trouble that seem very unfair and hard to understand?



How can we expect to understand all of God’s ways when nature holds mysteries we cannot understand?

AMMI: MY PEOPLE (Romans 9:25–29)

In Romans 9:25, Paul shares a verse from Hosea 2:23. And in Romans 9:26, Paul shares a verse from Hosea 1:10. The story behind the verses in Hosea is that God told Hosea to “‘marry a woman who has sex with anyone she wants’” (Hosea 1:2, NIV). Hosea’s awful marriage would be a living symbol for God’s connection to the nation of Israel. Israel had not been loyal to God. The people broke their connection to God by worshiping false gods. Hosea and his wife had three children. The first two children had names that showed that (1) God had turned away from Israel and (2) that God was punishing Israel for worshiping false gods. Hosea and his wife had a third child. This child’s name was *Loammi* (Hosea 1:9). *Loammi* meant “not my people.”

But Hosea said that the time would come when God no longer would punish His people. Instead, God would give riches to His people again. God would take away Israel’s false gods. God would make an agreement with Israel. (Read Hosea 2:11–19.) Then the people who were *Loammi*, or “not [God’s] people,” would become *Ammi*, “my people.” In Paul’s time, the *Ammi* were “the ones [God] chose. He did not choose only Jews. He also chose some [people] from among the people who are not Jews” (Romans 9:24, NIV). This verse shows us that the Good News was meant for everyone. No wonder we as Seventh-day Adventists believe our work for God includes the work shown in Revelation 14:6: “Then I saw another angel flying in the heavens. He was carrying the Good News that lasts forever. He was preaching to every nation and to every family group and to the people of every language and to all the people of the earth” (NIV). Today, and in Paul’s day, this Good News must be preached everywhere.

What important message do we find in Romans 9:25–29? What hope does Paul offer to his readers?

Many Jews rejected the message of the Good News. This sad fact caused Paul to say, “My sadness never ends” (Romans 9:2, NIV). But at least there was a remnant. You will recall 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. So, God does have a remnant among the Jews. And God’s promises do not fail the Jews, even when humans fail God and each other.



Hosea’s sad marriage would show God’s connection to the nation of Israel: Israel had not been loyal to God.

A ROCK THAT MAKES THEM FALL (Romans 9:30–32)

“The people who are not Jews were not made right with God by the Law. They were made right with God because they put their trust in Him. The Jews tried to be right with God by obeying the Law, but they did not become right with God. Why? Because they did not put their trust in God” (Romans 9:30–32, NIV). What message is there for us in these verses? More important, how can we take this message and put it to use in our own lives today? How can we avoid making the same mistakes in our lives that Israel made in their lives?

Paul uses words in these verses that no one can misunderstand. He explains to the Jews why they are missing out on what God wishes them to have. Notice that the non-Jews whom God accepted had not even been searching for God to accept them in the first place! Instead, these non-Jews lived only to make themselves happy. But then they heard the Good News. They accepted its message. And God announced these people were made right with Him.

The problem with the Jews in Paul’s time was that they “tripped over” the “Stone” (Jesus) (read Romans 9:33). Some Jews, but not all of them (read Acts 2:41), refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah was the One whom God chose to save His people from sin. But Jesus was not the Messiah the Jews were looking for. So, the Jews turned their backs on Jesus when He came.

Before Romans 9 ends, Paul shares another verse from the Old Testament: “The Holy Writings say, ‘See! I put in Jerusalem a Stone that people will trip over. It is a Rock that will make them fall. But the person who puts his trust in the Rock (Christ [Jesus]) will not be put to shame’ ” (Romans 9:33, NIV). Here, Paul shows again how important faith is in God’s plan to save us (read also 1 Peter 2:6–8). A Rock that will make people fall? Yes. But at the same time, anyone who believes in Jesus will not be ashamed. For many people, Jesus is a Stone that trips people up. But for the people who know and love Him, Jesus is a different Rock. He is “the rock that saves” (Psalm 89:26, NIV).

Has Jesus ever been to you a Rock that makes you fall? If yes, what were you doing that made you fall? How did you get up again? How has Jesus been the Rock that saves you?



For many people, Jesus is a Stone that trips them up. But for people who know and love God, Jesus is “the rock that saves”

(Psalm 89:26, NIV).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The Bible talks about how God chooses some people to be saved. Many have thought that this idea points to the future life and means that God chooses these people to have a lot of happiness in heaven. But this idea is not what the Bible means. Instead, the Bible shows us that God chose man to accept the gift of being saved. God chose man to work with God’s plan to save him. Man must do this work with a trembling heart filled with love and respect for God. God chose man to put on the armor [battle suit] of God. God chose man to fight the good fight of faith. God chose man to use the weapons God put in man’s reach to fight against every evil desire of man’s body. Satan tries to make man his slave. Satan wants to steal man’s gift of everlasting life. So, God chose man to watch out and pray. God chose man to search the Bible. God chose man to avoid giving in to sin. God chose man to show faith every minute of his life. And God chose man to obey every word that comes from God. What will happen if man chooses to do these things? Then man will be more than someone who knows the Word of God [the Bible]. Man also will be someone who does everything that God asks. This teaching is what the Bible means when it speaks about God’s choosing us.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] to Ministers [Pastors] and Gospel [Good News] Workers*, pages 453, 454, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Some Christians teach that God chooses some people to be saved and other people not to be saved. The Christians who think this way believe that we have no choice in the decision. These Christians say that God made this choice for you before you were born. What if you chose to be good every second of your life? But God chose not to save you. What would happen? Then you would be punished with everlasting death. For many people, this punishment means burning in hell forever. So, these people believe that the people whom God chooses not to save in this life will spend the next one burning forever in the fires of hell. What is wrong with this thinking? How is our view on the topic different?

- ② How is the work God gave to Seventh-day Adventists the same as the work God gave to Israel in Bible times? What is the same about this work? What is different? How are we doing better at our work than Israel did? Or are we doing worse? Explain.



God chose man to put on the whole armor [battle suit] of God. He has been chosen to fight the good fight of faith.