

Salvation for All

Key Text:	Romans 10 & 11
Key Verse(s):	“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:13-14)

Background to the Study

In chapter 10, Paul summarized Israel's role in God's plan, explaining that although the nation had the chance to accept the Gospel, they rejected it. He stressed that salvation is available to all, Jew and Gentile alike. Though Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, his love for his Jewish kinsmen was expressed in verses 1-5, as he made clear his sorrow and concern for his unsaved brethren. As a nation, the Jews possessed a great deal of religious zeal, but their zeal was “not according to knowledge” — they rejected God’s righteousness while trying to make themselves acceptable to Him through the Law of Moses and traditions which they themselves had instituted. In verses 6-13, Paul clarified that righteousness through Christ requires faith in the incarnation and resurrection. Salvation is available to all who believe and call on Christ. Even ethnic differences had no impact on salvation, for the Apostle asserted that there is “no difference” between Jew and Greek (or Gentile). Israel’s rejection of the Gospel is addressed in the final verses, where Paul shows that while the message was preached, it was met with unbelief. He used quotes from Isaiah and Psalm 19 to demonstrate that the message spread widely, and in the last verse, he depicted God’s plea for Israel to accept His grace.

In chapter 11, Paul focused on Israel’s eventual restoration, explaining that their rejection allowed the Gospel to reach the Gentiles. He refuted the idea that God had abandoned Israel by citing three examples. First, Paul asserted that his own personal relationship with God was proof that God’s mercy was still extended to Jews. Next, he pointed to the faithfulness of God and asserted that He would not disavow the promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David. Finally, he referenced the bleak national situation during the time of Elijah which caused the prophet to feel he was the only believer left, yet God had preserved seven thousand men who had “not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

In verses 11-24, Paul explained that God’s rejection of Israel aimed to provoke them to jealousy by offering salvation to the Gentiles. The “fullness” of Israel in verse 12 referred to their future restoration. Paul used two metaphors to show the unity between Jews and Gentiles. His statement that “if the firstfruit be holy, the lump [mass of dough] is also holy” was a reference to the ancient tradition of giving God the first cake baked from the first wheat of the harvest (see Numbers 15:19-20). If that cake was acceptable to God, the whole of the harvest

would be acceptable. Paul was likening the “firstfruit” to Israel, and the “lump” to the Gentiles. The second illustration — that of the root and branches — made the same point and was based upon the common Old Testament picture of Israel as a vine. Because the root (Israel) and the branches (the Gentile Christians) are all one plant, if the root is holy the branches are also holy. Paul expanded the metaphor in verses 17-18, warning the Gentiles that just as God did not spare the Jews when they lapsed into unbelief, neither would He preserve them unless they stood fast by faith. In verses 25-32, Paul foretold that after the “fullness of the Gentiles” is reached, “all Israel” will be saved. Paul closed this chapter with a heartfelt outpouring of praise for the mercy that is extended to both Jew and Gentile: “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!”

Testimony from Our Day

Many of us are fortunate to live in countries where religious freedom is valued and protected. It saddens us to hear about Christian brothers and sisters around the world facing execution for choosing to follow Christ. In regions where the Gospel is forcibly prohibited, it’s easy to assume there’s little hope for acceptance of Christ. However, a recent book opened my eyes to how the Holy Spirit is awakening hearts in some of the darkest parts of the world. One story that particularly struck me was about Hassan, a Christian in Cairo, Egypt, who felt a deep burden for his Muslim neighbours. For years, he tried to talk about Christ, but they showed no interest. One night, Hassan was abruptly awakened by a gun pressed to his forehead. A masked kidnapper ordered him out of his home and rushed him through the dark streets. Hassan thought he was about to be killed for his discreet evangelism. The kidnapper forced him to climb five flights of stairs and jump to the roof of an abandoned warehouse, then pushed him toward a hatchway. As he crawled through, Hassan whispered, “Jesus, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” Inside, he found ten Muslim imams, each of whom had privately converted to Christianity after dreaming of Jesus. They explained that they met secretly to pray for their families and the people in the mosques to come to Christ. They knew Hassan followed Jesus, and they asked him to teach them the Bible.

It’s incredible that in a society so hostile to Christianity, people are risking their lives to embrace Jesus. Reflecting on this, I realize my reaction is similar to early Christians who were amazed that Gentiles—those who didn’t even believe in a Messiah—could receive the Gospel. Despite mankind’s guilt before God, Paul declared that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” People won’t call on Christ unless they believe, but God faithfully reaches out to everyone. How comforting it is to know that even in areas of the deepest spiritual darkness, the light of Jesus penetrates. Let’s allow the Lord to increase our faith, broaden our perspectives, and help us to pray earnestly that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will find entrance into the hearts of people everywhere!

A Closer Look

Question 1	According to Romans 10:9, what are the two requirements for receiving salvation?
Question 2	In Romans 10:3, Paul referenced the failure of the Jews to grasp the true meaning of information available to them in the Scriptures they studied so zealously. Paul's declaration that they endeavored to "establish their own righteousness" indicated the Jews' self-righteous pride in their own efforts. They were seeking to live up to the commandments of the Law only to prove their own worthiness. Paul went on in the next verse to assert that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." What do you think he meant by that statement?
Question 3	How can we have a part in fulfilling the responsibilities implied in the four questions posed in Romans 10:14-15?
Question 4	In Romans 11, what Old Testament prophet did Paul use as an example to support his assertion that God always has a remnant of individuals who are faithful to Him?
Question 5	In Romans 11:33-36, Paul concluded his synopsis of Israel's role in God's plan with a spontaneous outpouring of praise to God. Who could have conceived of the whole scenario with Israel and the Gentiles as God had done? Paul realized that God's ways are past finding out, and that His wisdom and knowledge were beyond him. In reference to Paul's thought expressed in verse 36, in what way are all things "of" God, "through God," and "to" God when it comes to our salvation?
Question 6	Romans 11:7-8 bring out that Israel's sin resulted in spiritual blindness and the "spirit of slumber." What are some evidences that this is also the spiritual condition of most people in our world today?

Take Home

God is still working in our world today, even in cultures that appear to be unreceptive and hostile to the Gospel. Although the Jewish people rejected their Messiah and failed in their role as the instrument of God's blessing to the Gentiles, God did not forsake them. He has mercy toward all—both Jew and Gentile—who turn to Him in faith.