

THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

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Romans 11:1-6 says, "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. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elijah? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 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. *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 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.*" There are many who mistakenly understand and falsely affirm that the Bible teaches that salvation is by grace only, as if this passage (and others like it) speaks of any and all works of obedience to God. But that is not the kind of works that this text is speaking about.

The remnant of the Jews

The context of Romans 11:1-6 is clearly speaking of *the works of the Old Testament Law*. Romans 11:5 speaks of a "remnant" being reserved "according to the election of grace." Verse six continues the thought, explaining that if this remnant is saved by grace, then that remnant is not being saved by works. But who is this remnant? The remnant is of physical Israel. The contrast between the number of Jews and Gentiles being saved goes back to the beginning of Romans chapter nine. There, Paul expressed the "great heaviness and continual sorrow" that was in his heart because of the lost condition of so many of his "kinsmen according to the flesh," the "Israelites" (Rom 9:1-5). Paul then pointed out that in the New Testament, Israel is a spiritual nation, and children of Abraham, the children of the promise, are counted for the seed, not just his physical seed (Rom 9:6-21). As Hosea

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prophesied (Hos 1:10; 2:23), this spiritual seed includes Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom 9:22-26). This seed, the children of the promise, are those who “have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith” (Rom 9:30). This included many Gentiles (Rom 9:30), but only a remnant of Jews (Rom 9:27-29), because most of the Jews rejected Christ (Rom 9:31-33).

The righteousness of an obedient faith

Paul desired and prayed that Israel would be saved (Rom 10:1), but they were going about to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting to the righteousness of God (Rom 10:2-3). The righteousness which is of faith in Christ could not come by the Old Law (Rom 9:30-32). The Jews tried to attain that righteousness “by the works of the law” (Rom 9:32), without doubt speaking of the works of the Old Testament law (see also Rom 3-4). The righteousness of the Old Law is contrasted with the righteousness which is of faith in Christ (Rom 10:4-9). Only by an obedient faith in the gospel of Christ can a person be saved (Rom 10:10-17). The Jews had heard this gospel, but only a very few believed and obeyed it (Rom 10:18-21). The few who did believe and obey the gospel of Christ, including Paul, composed that “remnant” of Jews who were saved by the election of grace (Rom 11:1-5), not by works (Rom 11:6). This can only be referring to the works of the Old Testament law, as previously stated in Romans 9:32. Romans 11:6 is positively *not* speaking of works of obedience in general. For one thing, that would contradict the immediate context, which teaches the necessity of obedience to obtain salvation (Rom 10:13-21). It also would contradict the remainder of the New Testament, which teaches that faith without works of obedience is dead (Jas 2:14-26). God’s grace *teaches* obedience to the gospel (Titus 2:11-14). Only those who obey Christ will be saved (Heb 5:9; 2 Thes 1:7-10).