

2 Paths to being set right with God (Romans 10)

God's gift of the Messiah revealed his faithfulness to the Jewish people. The problem is that God has been far too generous. *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,"* God said. That included Israel with their golden calf and Pharaoh with his hard heart. *"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people,"* said God. That includes the nations that conquered Israel as well as the Jewish people. God has raised up his Messiah over Israel and the nations, so he calls everyone—Jew and gentile—to faithfulness to the Messiah.

Since God's grace doesn't match our sense of justice, many in Israel kept relying on the Torah to make them right with God. They tripped over the gift God gave them, the Messiah as the foundation stone for the restoration of God's reign. All that God calls for is faithfulness to his Messiah, but many in Israel kept relying on observance of the Torah's regulations to make them right with God. Paul shared the grief on God's heart. That's a quick overview of Romans 9. Any questions before we proceed to Romans 10?

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2.1 The Messiah was always the goal (10:1-4)

Romans 10:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.



The goal of the Law always was the Messiah.

Words like “saved” (verse 1) have taken on a religious meaning that wasn't there when Paul dictated these words to Tertius (16:22). “Saved” did not mean getting converted to Christianity or getting a ticket to heaven. Paul envisaged God **rescuing** his people from oppression to the powers of sin and death, restoring them to God's reign in the Messiah. It was something like a new exodus, like when God saved Jacob's family from Pharaoh and established them as a nation under God's reign at Sinai. Paul yearns to see his people rescued from their seemingly interminable oppression, to be a people under God's governance in Christ.

Many of his people are just like Paul before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul was strongly committed to living by the Law God gave Israel at Sinai. He was zealous to chase down anyone who saw Jesus as the centre of God's activity in the world rather than the Jerusalem temple. They believe they are set right with God by obeying the Law God gave them. What they don't know is that God gives them right-standing with himself through allegiance (faith[fulness]) to his Messiah (verses 2-3).

The NIV is right to translate verse 4 as, *Christ is the **culmination** of the law*. Many translations read, *Christ is the **end** of the law* since the word *telos* means end or goal. But Paul is not saying, “Now that Christ has come let’s get rid of the Torah.” He’s saying, “The goal of the Torah always was the Messiah.” In establishing Israel as a nation under God’s reign through the Sinai covenant, the end God had in mind was to bring the nations back under this reign through the Messiah. Moses spoke of the one who was to come: “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*” (Deuteronomy 18:15)

The Law was not a bad thing. It was an important step towards the greater goal: the blessing of God’s reign restored to the nations through a descendant of Abraham. But now that Christ has come, people are no longer treated as right with God through obedience to the Torah. People are treated as right with God through placing their *trust* in God’s Anointed. And this right-standing with God isn’t just for the nation that received the Torah; it’s for everyone who trusts the Messiah’s leadership (verse 4).

2.2 What you rely on to be right with God (10:5-7)

Laws are designed to save lives and to give us a quality of life that’s fair and just. For example, the laws about speed limits save lives.

Imagine a blue flashing light in your mirrors. You pull over and say, “Officer, I don’t think I was speeding.” “You weren’t,” she says, “but you don’t have your seatbelt on, and was that a mobile phone in your hand?” Those laws are also designed to save lives, but you have to be obeying **all** the laws or the court will find you guilty.

That’s what it was like for Israel under the Sinai covenant:

Romans 10:5 (NIV)

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law:

“The person who does these things will live by them.” [Leviticus 18:5]

The Torah was for their good, promising life to those who obeyed God. But right standing with God was conditional on obeying all the laws. It called Israel to live differently to the nations. Jewish Christians in Rome therefore called gentile Christians to obey the Torah too, for it included sanctions for disobedience:

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, 36 (NIV)

¹ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today ... ² all these blessings will come on you ...

¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ...

³⁶ The LORD will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your ancestors.



The ultimate sanction for persistent disobedience was that the nation would fall. But the exile was not the end. If they returned to the LORD, he would gather them and reign over them again:

Deuteronomy 30:1-3, 11-15 (NIV)

¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² and when you and your children **return to the LORD your God** and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and **gather you again** from all the nations where he scattered you. ...

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “**Who will ascend into heaven** to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “**Who will cross the sea to get it** and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”

¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. ¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

Six centuries after the exile to Babylon (586 BC), the Torah's requirements did seem impossible to many Jews. They were still under foreign rule. It felt like no one could ascend into heaven to bring God's reign back to earth. Ruled from across the seas (Rome), it felt like an uncrossable chasm was separating from God's reign.

But Paul sees that God has fulfilled his promises to his people by doing for them what they could not do for themselves. That's what Paul has been saying:

Romans 3:21-24 (my translation)

²¹ Now, separate from Torah, God's righteousness has become manifest, having received the witness of the Torah and the Prophets,

²² God's righteousness [made visible] through the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus into all the faithful. For there is no distinction, ²³ for all who offended and lack God's splendour ²⁴ are being set right as a gift by his generosity, through the emancipation in Messiah Jesus.

While they, in their unfaithfulness, were doing wrong by God, God in his faithfulness has done right by them by sending the Messiah to do for them what they could not do for themselves:

- God doesn't expect them to **climb up into heaven** to bring his reign back to earth. God has sent his Messiah from heaven.
- God doesn't expect them to **cross the depths**. The Messiah entered the abyss, the death of the nation, to reconcile them to God.

In the Messiah, God has fulfilled for his people the promises of restoration from exile:

Romans 10:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)

⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [Deuteronomy 30:12-13]

God's people are restored to his reign not through obedience to all the Torah's laws, but by declaring their *faith*[fulness] to his Messiah.

2.3 How we respond (10:8-13)

The next verse in Deuteronomy 30 presents God as listening for his people to respond to what he has done. Paul understands this response to be a declaration of loyalty (faith) to God's Anointed, the ruler God has raised up for them:

Romans 10:8-11 (NIV)

⁸ But what does it say?

“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” [Dt 30:14] that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

¹¹ As Scripture says,

“Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” [Isaiah 28:16]

In response to the unfaithful world crucifying his Messiah, God proclaimed Jesus to be *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 1:4).

Our response must be to recognize the one God has installed to lead us:
*to declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.*

This is how the world is *saved* from its oppression under Sin and Death, restored as a kingdom of God in the authority of his Christ (verses 9-10).

Isaiah 28 called for *faith* in the Messiah whom God would send to set things right (*justice, righteousness*), i.e. to restore God's reign over them:

Isaiah 28:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who **relies on** it will never be stricken with panic.

¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line
and righteousness the plumb line; ...

¹⁸ Your **covenant with death** will be annulled;
your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand.”

Isaiah saw God's people relying on the rulers of the kingdoms of the world instead of relying on God. Their covenant with Assyria saw them paying tribute to Assyria that lead to their demise (2 Kings 17:3-5). Later Judah also paid tribute to Babylon, leading to its downfall (2 Kings 24:20–25:12). But Isaiah's term seems most apt for the treach-

ery of handing the Messiah over to their Romans overlords to be crucified (compare Acts 4:27), *the covenant with death* God annulled by raising up his Son to reign as Lord of all, the *sure foundation* of heaven's reign over all the peoples of the earth.

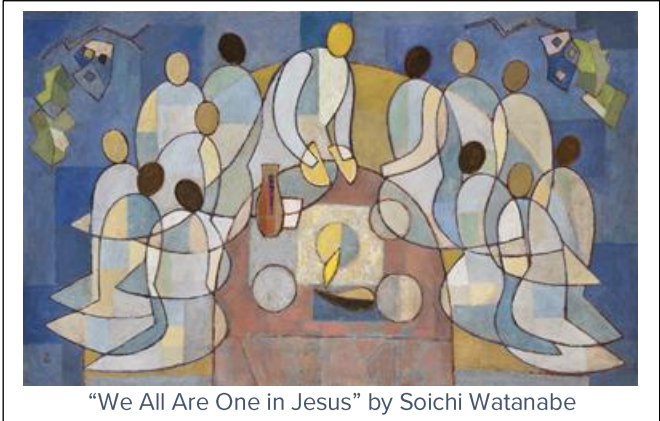
That means everyone—Jew or gentile can be set right with God through Messiah rather than through the Law:

Romans 10:12-13 (NIV)

¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

¹³ for,

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [Joel 2:32]



“We All Are One in Jesus” by Soichi Watanabe

The prophet Joel lived at a time when locusts were invading Judah. Locusts were one of the plagues that covenant disobedience could bring on Israel, and Deuteronomy 28:41 explicitly associates them with captivity. The “locusts” in Joel could therefore be a symbol for the Babylonian army destroying Jerusalem: *They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers* (Joel 2:7). Joel’s point is that, after Jerusalem had been captured and exiled, the LORD would return to rescue them and reign over them in *the great and terrifying day of the LORD* (Joel 2:31). “The day of the LORD” means the time when YHWH reigns over his people again, just as “the day of Solomon” means the time when Solmon reigned.

So Joel describes the day of YHWH’s reign like this:

Joel 2:32 (NIV)

Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;

for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance,

as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

For the LORD to *save* his people, he must have dealt with the nations who had oppressed them. To deliver *Mount Zion (Jerusalem)*, God must have brought the nations under control. So Paul sees the **everyone** of Joel 2:32 as all earth-dwellers: *the survivors whom the Lord calls* are not just Jews.

This is Paul’s gospel. To *call on the name of the LORD* is to recognize his authority and therefore to live under his leadership. The LORD’s authority is restored to the earth in his Messiah, his anointed ruler. Therefore *everyone* (Jew and gentile) *who calls on the name of the LORD* (in the person of Jesus the Messiah) *will be saved* (rescued from the powers of Sin and Death), to live *in the day of the LORD* (God’s reign in his Son).

That’s how Paul understands Joel’s good news (verse 13).

But in the first century, most gentiles had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. *Ruler, saviour* and *Lord* were titles Caesar used. When Rome captured a city and asked the people, “Who is your Lord?” they all knew they needed to give allegiance to Caesar and not to the king Caesar had just killed.

2.4 Proclaiming the good news (10:14-21)

But if the peoples of the world had never heard of Jesus, how could they be rescued from the reign of Sin and Death, into the reign of the Lord?

Romans 10:14-17 (NIV)

- ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written:
“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” [Isaiah 52:7]
¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says,
“Lord, who has believed our message?” [Isaiah 53:1]
¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Ever since meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul has lived to proclaim *the gospel (euangelion)*. This word has its roots in the Greek translation of Isaiah. After announcing the exile to Babylon (39:7), Isaiah announces the *good news* that YHWH will return to reign over his people (40:9-11).

Then Isaiah 40–52 explains how Israel was unable to fulfil their role as *the servant of the LORD*, called to demonstrate God's salvation to the nations (e.g. 49:6). So, God himself took the role of *servant* to save them—a servant of his fallen servant!

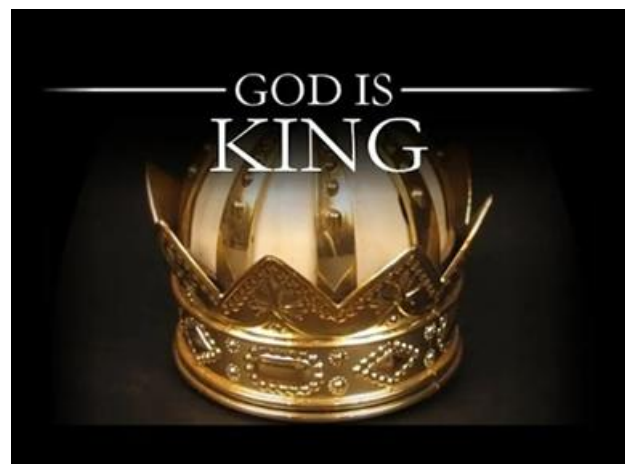
So, even though Israel brought God's name into disrepute among the nations, the *gospel* is that God comes to save his people. In doing so, God brings the kings of the earth under his authority, reigning over his people and the nations:

Isaiah 52:5-10 (NIV)

- ⁵ “And now what do I have here?” declares the LORD. “For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,” declares the LORD. “And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.
⁶ Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.”
⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring **good news**, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “**Your God reigns!**” ...
¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare **his holy arm** in the sight of all the nations, and **all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.**

When the LORD rolls up his sleeves (*bare his holy arm*) to do what Israel could not do for herself, *the nations ... see the salvation of our God*. This is how

God saves the whole earth from its oppression under the kingdoms that serve Sin and Death: by confronting the power of Sin at the cross, raising up his Messiah out of Death to reign with heaven's authority on earth. That is *God's gospel* (Romans 1:1-5).



But God's reign is re-established not by force but by the servant of the LORD bearing in his own body the evil people do as they serve sin:

Isaiah 52:11–53:1 (NIV)

¹³ See, my servant will act wisely;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—
¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.
53 ¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has **the arm of the LORD** been revealed?

As Isaiah sees, the way God restores his people is so counter-intuitive that God's people will struggle to believe it. They weren't expecting a Messiah who would take up the pain of his people and suffer for them (53:4), crushed for their iniquities, wounded for their healing (53:5), assigned a grave with the wicked (53:9) before he sees the light of life (53:11), given an inheritance with the great (53:12).

Because that's not the Messiah they expected, most Israelites don't recognize him:

Romans 10:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says,
“Lord, who has believed our message?” [Isaiah 53:1]
¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

They need to hear of the message about the Messiah who is the expression of God's faithfulness to them. As Paul put it: *Now, apart from the Torah, God-doing-right has become manifest in the faith[fulness] of Messiah Jesus for all who give him their faith[fulness], so there is no difference between Jew and gentile* (Romans 3:22-23).

Israel's failure to recognize their Messiah is Paul's grief (9:1-5). Non-Jews have been more responsive to God bringing his Messiah to Zion as the foundation stone of heaven's reign over the earth (9:30-32). Paul constantly prays for his people to recognize the salvation God has provided in the Messiah who fulfils everything God began in the Torah (10:1-4).

Actually, it's not true that they haven't heard Jesus being proclaimed as the Messiah. Everywhere Paul went, he took the message to Jews first (Romans 1:16; 2:9-10; Acts 13:46; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4 etc).

In any case, the whole creation speaks of how God governs the world:

Romans 10:18-19 (NIV)

¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:
“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.” [Psalm 19:4]

¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,
“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” [Deut 32:21]

Deuteronomy 32 is the song of Moses, calling the covenant people to remain faithful to their heavenly sovereign:

Deuteronomy 32:15-16, 20-21 (NIV)

¹⁵ They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Saviour. ¹⁶ They made him jealous with their foreign gods ...

²⁰ “I will hide my face from them,” he said, “and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful.

²¹ **They made me jealous** by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. **I will make them envious** by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.”

God was not rejecting Israel when he extended the Messiah's rule to gentiles. Just as Israel had been called to be the light of God's presence to the gentiles (Isaiah 49:6), God saving the gentiles was intended to show Israel what they were missing, *to make Israel envious* (Romans 11:11, 14).

Romans 10 concludes by describing the world as Isaiah anticipated it would be:

Romans 10:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰ And Isaiah boldly says,
“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” [Isaiah 65:1]

²¹ But concerning Israel he says,
“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.” [Isaiah 65:2]

The final chapters of Isaiah see the complete restoration of the earth under heaven's reign, *the new heavens and a new earth* (Isaiah 65:7–66:24). This all happens through the servant of the LORD bearing the sin of the world in his own body, and being raised out of death to reign (Isaiah 53).

And yet:

Isaiah 65:1-2 (NIV)

¹ “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’

² All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people,
who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.

It's a beautiful picture of God revealing himself in Christ, “Here I am! Here I am!” Ironically, the violent nations that oppressed Israel seem more responsive to the good news of the restoration of God's reign on earth than the nation that had already experienced something of God's reign through the Sinai covenant. That's Paul's grief.

2.5 So What?

Imagine Volodymyr Zelenskyy finding a Russian in Ukraine. There'd be an interrogation to discover, "Whose side are you on? Are you working for Russia or Ukraine? Where is your allegiance?" In any war-torn region, that's what matters.

In a world where the nations have suppressed God's sovereignty and substituted it with their own (Romans 1:18-23) and the Jewish people have also been unfaithful to their heavenly sovereign (Romans 2:1–3:20), God has one question for Jews and gentiles: "Where does your faithfulness lie? Do you give your allegiance to the Son I placed in power by raising him from the dead? Who do you call on as your Lord?"

Anyone who genuinely trusts Jesus leadership from the heart is declared to be right with God (justified), saved from the dominion of Sin and Death, into the reign of the Son who defeated Sin by giving his life and overturned Death when he was raised up to reign. The rescue God provided in the Messiah is for everyone—Jew and gentile. There's no difference. Since the same Lord is Lord of all, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:8-13).

There are some who imagine that God must yet fulfil his promises to restore Israel and set his king over them. That's not how Paul sees it. In text after text, Paul makes the point that all God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Messiah. When God gave Israel his Law at Sinai, his purpose was always to bring the Messiah into the world, for *Christ is the culmination of the Law* (10:4). Everything the Prophets said about God restoring the kingship are also fulfilled in Christ—for Israel and the nations. *For no matter how many promises God made, they are "Yes" in Christ* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Don't look at national Israel or current events to see the Scriptures fulfilled. Look at the Messiah. The gospel God promised beforehand through his prophets were about his Son, the physical descendant of King David who was named "Son of the divine ruler with power" by the cleansing Spirit when he raised up King Jesus from the dead. Jesus is therefore our ruler, and we've received his favour—appointing us to call all the nations into trusting obedience under his authority (Romans 1:2-5).

The gospel is the good news that God's king is Lord of all. The gospel calls for faith[fulness] to the Messiah. That's what sets us right with God (justifies), so we do right[eousness]. That's how the gospel sets the world right.

Your thoughts?

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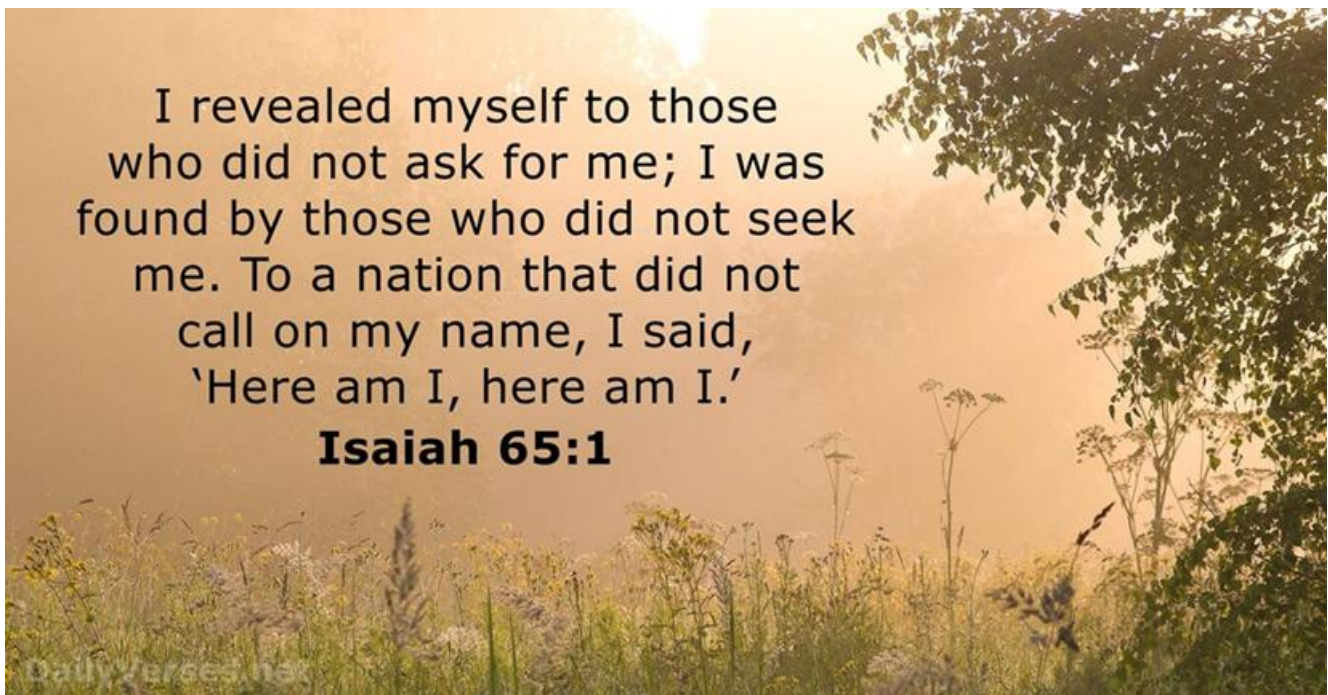
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Tom Wright summarizes these chapters of Romans:

What Paul is doing in 9:6–10:13 is *telling the Torah's own story of Israel*, from the call of Abraham through to the ... *telos*, the 'goal', the 'end' in the sense of 'the moment when, with the covenant renewed, Israel would finally be established as God's people'. *Telos gar nomou Christos*, writes Paul (10:4): the Messiah is the end, the goal, the final destination of Torah. This is where the narrative had been heading all along. Through the Messiah the prophecies have come true, the covenant has been re-established, exile is over, God himself has acted to unveil his faithfulness to his promises, and God's people are now able ... to keep Torah from the heart.⁵



For next week, read Romans 11.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1172.