

## **Are the Jews God's Chosen People?**

Romans 9:1-5

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

*They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. - Romans 9:4-5, ESV*

Some questions are too complex for a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Either answer could be misunderstood and taken to an extreme beyond what was intended. When I was a kid, we would ask each other "Do you love \_\_\_\_\_?" (ice cream, football, recess, your grandmother, etc.) If the person said yes, we would then quickly say, "Well, do you want to marry it/her?" So the answer was yes, but no.

Today's question arising from the opening of Romans 9 has a similar yes, but no, answer. The question, "Are the Jews God's chosen people?" seems simple enough. God chose Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob to receive the covenant promises, to be given His word, to be called His holy nation. So, yes, the Jews are God's chosen people.

But if the Jews are God's chosen people, why is Paul in such anguish over them? Why does he say, "*I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*"? Being God's chosen people evidently does not mean that the Jewish people are all saved. Having received the covenant promises, the Jewish people largely cut themselves off from the fulfillment of those promises by refusing to believe in Jesus.

Paul's language regarding the Jewish people is very careful and nuanced. Earlier, in Romans 3:1-2, he had asked, "*Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?*" His answer was, "*Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*" Paul then broke off his answer to his own question and didn't finish. Here, it seems as if he is resuming the answer six chapters later.

The blessings, or advantages, to being Jewish are listed by Paul as including . . .

- adoption as the chosen children of God, but not in a saving sense, or else Paul would not be in anguish
- the glory of having God dwell in their midst
- the covenants, those promises and pledges from God and a relationship with God that set them apart from the nations
- the giving of the law, which is a reflection of the character and justice of God
- the worship, meaning God's direction for how to worship Him rightly
- the promises of God
- the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- being the physical ancestors of Christ

What we should notice is that all of these blessings and benefits were preparatory in nature. They were all designed to lead to Jesus.

Someone once said that the Old Testament without the New is a set of unanswered questions, unfulfilled prophecies, unexplained ceremonies, and un-kept promises. Now that's sad! To have received all of the preparation and to miss the consummation in Jesus is to be chosen by God but to walk away and reject your election.

As we continue in Romans, we'll be exploring this more deeply. Among other things, we'll see that national election according to the flesh is not the same as spiritual election according to the promise. As we continue in these next few chapters, we'll see Paul wrestle with some of the deepest implications of biblical theology before responding finally at the end of chapter 11 with the highest praise.