

# The privileges of the Israelites, and our privileges as believers, part 1

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon  
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*Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised!  
Amen. (Romans 9.4 – 5)*

## Introduction

Last time we started looking at Romans chapter 9. We saw from the opening verses that the apostle Paul showed great concern for his fellow Israelites who were not saved. We learned from this that we should have concern for unsaved members of our families, unsaved neighbours, unsaved work colleagues, and unsaved fellow citizens, as well as, along with the apostle, concern for unsaved Jews.

Today we are going to be thinking about verses 4 and 5, which speak of the privileges of the Israelites. Paul is saying that he feels all the more sad for his fellow Israelites because they had had so many privileges, yet most had not taken advantages of these privileges in order to come to a true knowledge of God.

I think that most of us, if not all of us, who are here today are Gentiles, that is, not Jews. So what good will it do us to learn of the privileges of the Jews? It will do us much good because each of the privileges that are mentioned here has its counterpart in our experience as Christians. The privileges of the Jews that are listed here are a sort of summary of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written for the benefit of those of us who now are Christian believers. In Romans chapter 15 verse 4 the apostle says, "Everything that was written in the past was

written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

So as we learn about the privileges that the Israelites had in the Old Testament times, I hope it will help those of us who are Christians to understand more fully the privileges we have in the present age in which we live. If you are not yet a Christian, I hope that what we will look at will help you to understand the privileges that can be yours, and that God will use this to bring you to himself.

There are eight privileges that are mentioned here in these verses. My plan today is for us to think about the first three that the apostle mentions:

1. The Israelites were adopted collectively as the son of God.
2. The Israelites had the knowledge of the glory of God.
3. The Israelites were included in the covenants of God.

So let us think about these now.

## **1. They were adopted collectively as the son of God**

The apostle says in verse 14, “Theirs is the adoption as sons.” The literal translation of this phrase is “To whom belongs the adoption”. The word “sons” is not present in the Greek.

Israel was adopted by God corporately as the collective son of God. At a point in the history of Israel, God’s people were enslaved in Egypt. God said to Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, as recorded in Exodus chapter 4 verses 22 and 23, “This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so that he may worship me.’ ”

Later the people rebelled against God, and God used the Babylonian Empire to judge his people and send them into exile. But he promised that he would bring them back. The book of Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 8 and 9 records God saying,

See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

God says in Hosea chapter 11 verse 1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."

So the people of God in Old Testament times had been collectively adopted as God's son. They had a special place in the world. They were treated as a child of God, and loved by him, but also disciplined by him. They were not all saved individually, but, collectively, they knew God as their father. No other nation in the world had this astonishing privilege of being called the son of God.

The adoption of Israel by God was pointing forward to the even greater privilege that we who are Christian believers now have. We who are believers have been individually adopted by God to be his children. The adoption of Israel as God's son was something that was corporate, for the whole nation of Israel, and individual Israelites did not necessarily have the privilege of knowing God personally. But for us now, all true believers are adopted by God, and are for ever his children, in a close personal relationship with him. Paul spoke about this earlier on in Romans, in chapter 8, where he said, in verses 13 to 17,

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Those of us who trust in Christ have been adopted as God's children. We can speak with him as our loving heavenly Father. He will never disown us. We will always be his children. As his children we are also his heirs, and co-heirs with Christ of all the blessings of the future age.

So we see that Israelites had the privilege of being corporately adopted by God, and we who are believers have an even greater privilege of being individually adopted by God.

## **2. They had an experience of the glory of God**

The second thing we see is that the Israelites experienced the glory of God. The apostle says in verse 14, "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory."

What is the glory of God? It is God's magnificence and splendour. It manifests itself in brilliant white light, and sometimes in fire and smoke. When they were rescued from Egypt, the presence of God was with them in a cloud. We read in Exodus chapter 19 and verses 21 and 22,

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Later, in the desert, the glory of God came down on the top of Mount Sinai, as Moses went up the mountain to receive God's laws. We read in Exodus 24 verses 15 to 17,

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

While Moses was up the mountain, the people sinned by making a golden calf and worshipping it. When he came down the mountain, Moses threw down the tablets of the Ten Commandments and broke them. Later, he went up the mountain a second time, with new stone tablets. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face was shining with the glory of God. We read in Exodus chapter 34, verses 29 to 35,

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

Moses's face was radiant with the glory of God, as he had been in God's presence and had seen his glory. This was too much for the Israelites, and Moses had to put a veil over his face when he was with them.

The glory of God was also manifested when the tabernacle was completed, and the glory of God came and filled the tabernacle. We read in Exodus 40 and verse 34 to 35, "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

Something similar happened when the temple was built a few hundred years later, in the time of Solomon. We read in 1 Kings, chapter 8 and verses 10 to 11, "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple."

So the Israelites experienced the glory of God. No other nation upon earth had the privilege of experiencing the glory of God in this sense. But we who are believers in New Covenant times have seen, by faith, an even greater glory in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God become man. John says, in chapter 1 of his Gospel, verse 14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3 Paul refers to the time when the Israelites put a veil over Moses's face, because they could not look at his glory. He says that the glory that we have received in the Gospel is greater than the glory that the Israelites saw at the time of Moses. He says in verses 7 to 11 of that chapter,

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

We know now, with the coming of Christ, a glory which surpasses what was known at the time of Moses. He goes on to say that whereas the Israelites in Old Testament times had to ask Moses to veil his face, for us who believe, the veil is taken away. And, he says, we “who with unveiled faces all reflect [or gaze upon] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to see the glory of Christ.

The apostle goes on to say, in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians, verse 6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Moreover, God has caused us to shine with his reflected glory. The glory of God is his own possession, but we who are Christians are glorified in Christ. The apostle said in chapter 8 of this letter of Romans, verse 30, “those he [God] justified, he also glorified.” That glory that we have is hidden now, but will be revealed when Christ comes again.

So we see that the Israelites had the great privilege of experiencing the glory of God, and that we who are believers experience that glory even more fully through our knowledge of Christ.

### **3. They had the privilege of being included in the covenants of God**

Hear again verse 4. The apostle says, “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants.”

What is a covenant? A covenant is an agreement, or a treaty, or a contract. An example of a human covenant is marriage. When a man and a woman get married, they publicly agree and promise, before witnesses, that they will own each other as husband and wife, and that they will be faithful to each other for the rest of their lives. It is on the basis of this covenant that they set up home together, and enjoy a sexual relationship together.

The covenants that God makes with men are similar to the covenants that men and women make when they get married, but there is one important difference: when God enters into a covenant with men he does so as the initiator and as the stronger party. Entirely of his own will, due to his gracious kindness, without having been asked to, he

makes promises of blessings to men, and then tells us what he expects us to do in return.

The foundation covenant, which was the basis for all the other covenants with the Israelites, was the covenant that God made with Abram, who became Abraham. God chose Abram out of all the people on the earth, and said that he was going to make a great nation out of him, and cause his offspring to be a source of blessing to the whole world. This is described in Genesis chapter 15. In verse 1 of that chapter it is recorded that God appeared to Abram in a vision, and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Abram did not understand, because he was childless, and very old, and therefore at the time was expecting that a servant in his household would inherit all that he had. But God answered him that this servant would not, in fact, inherit the property, but, rather, that a son coming from Abram's own body would be his heir. Then God said, as recorded in verse 5, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Later in the chapter, in verses 18 to 19, we read,

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

This covenant that God made with Abraham was renewed and repeated with Abraham's son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob, who was renamed "Israel" by God. Then a famine arose, and Jacob and his family moved to Egypt. At first they were welcomed there, but then a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt who enslaved the Israelites and subjected them to cruel work. The people cried out to God, and God answered them. He appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, and said to him, as recorded in Exodus chapter 6 and verses 2 to 8,

I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with

mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.'

So we see that it was in order to be faithful to his covenant to Abraham that God determined to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt.

God then did a series of mighty miracles, the end of which was that the Egyptians thrust the Israelites out of Egypt. The Israelites then went into the desert of Sinai, and there they gathered round Sinai, and God spoke to them from the mountain telling them the laws that he expected them to keep. What was happening here? God was entering into a further covenant with the nation of Israel. It is recorded in Exodus chapter 19 and verses 4 to 6 that just before God gave the Ten Commandments to the people, he told Moses to say these words to the people:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God was entering into covenant with them. The terms of this covenant were that if the people would keep his holy law, then out of all the nations they would be his people and a treasured possession.

There is one more covenant that we should mention, and that is the covenant that God made with David. God promised to David that he would always have one of his descendants upon the throne. David had wanted to build a house for God, a temple. But God said to David that he was not the one to build God's house. Instead, God said, through the prophet Nathan that he, God, would build a house for David. It is recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 7 and verses 11 to 16,

The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall

endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

This covenant was fulfilled partially by the reign of King Solomon, but ultimately by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the great King of Israel. Have you ever wondered why, in the readings that we tend to have around Christmas time, it is mentioned so many times that Jesus is descended from David? This is why. It is to show that this promise to David has been fulfilled.

So the people of Israel were the beneficiaries of these wonderful and gracious covenants. With no other people on earth did God enter into covenant in the way in which he entered into covenant with the people of Israel.

But we who are Christians are beneficiaries of a new and even better covenant than the covenants that God made with Israel. God promised through his prophet Jeremiah, in chapter 31 of the book named after him, verses 31 to 34, that he would establish a new covenant. God inspired the prophet to write,

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

God promises that he will enter into a new covenant with his people which will be different from the old covenant that was established through Moses. That old covenant was conditional, dependent upon the obedience of the people of Israel. But this new covenant, God promised, will not be dependent upon man's obedience, but upon God's unconditional love. This is a covenant which will not be able to be broken. Under this covenant, instead of the law being written on tablets of stone, it will now be written on men's hearts, so people will have the power to obey God. Instead of a few people knowing God, all those

who are truly God's people will know him., because all God's people will know that their sins have been completely forgiven.

Who are the beneficiaries of this new covenant? All true Christians! God has entered into covenant with us, and has promised us vast blessings in Christ. Nothing can stop him from doing these things for us.

## **Conclusion**

We have thought today about three of the blessings that God gave to the people of Israel: adoption, the experience of God's glory, and the covenants. How blessed they were! What a tragedy it was, therefore, when so many Israelites refused to believe. How sad it is that even to this day many Jews do not believe in Christ. But if the Israelites were blessed in these ways, how vastly more blessed are those of us who are true Christians!

What can we take from this for ourselves practically? Let me address three groups: those who are Christians, those who have been brought up in Christian homes but are not yet Christians, and those who are not yet Christians and have had little prior knowledge of Christianity before.

Firstly, those of us who are Christians this morning should realise how fortunate we are, and should live lives of gratitude to God for what he has done for us. We have been adopted as God's children! We have seen the glory of God in Christ, and are heirs of that glory! We are the beneficiaries of the wonderful new covenant that God has made with his people! How can we feel sorry for ourselves? Yes, we may indeed have sorrows in this life, but we have unspeakable happiness waiting for us at the resurrection. Lift up your head! Rejoice! Serve God gladly, because you are so blessed

Secondly, let me address those of us who are not yet Christians but have been brought up in Christian homes. If you are in this category, your position is not that dissimilar to that of the unbelieving Jews. Like them you have known about God's adoption. Like them, you have seen something of God's glory. Like them, you have heard of the covenants that God has made with his people. What a tragedy if, having known these things, you still do not believe. If you know these things, but do not believe, then your sin is very great, much greater than the sin of someone who has never known these things. I urge you, stop rebelling against God. Come to Christ for salvation.

Thirdly, let me address those of us who are not yet Christians but have had little previous knowledge about God. I hope you will see from what we have learned today that there are vast blessings that you can know through Jesus Christ. You can be adopted as a child of God! You can see the glory of Christ! You can be included in God's covenant of grace. Come to him. Trust him to be your Saviour. Let him wash your sins away, and change your life, that you may be a beneficiary of these blessings.

*This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at*

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=111917731460>

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