

Romans 9 – The Blessings of Israel

After declaring his confidence in God's blessings of salvation, and the enduring truth of His love for the saved, Paul's thoughts naturally went to God's "original" chosen people – the Israelites. He expresses his great desire that they would recognize and receive the great salvation made possible through Jesus Christ. The fact that the nation of Israel had rejected Christ as Messiah, and that the majority of Jews continued to do so broke his heart. This is particularly hard on Paul for two reasons – first, they were his kinsmen, his own relatives. Second, as God's chosen people, they had a rich history of blessings that should point them directly to Christ, but they couldn't see it. What were these blessings he referred to?

"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." These are things that distinguished the Jewish people from all others, and pointed to Christ, so we want to take a closer look at them.

Israelites – he used the royal name, rather than the more common "Jews." Remember that the name Israel was given to Jacob by God, when it was declared that he, as a prince, had power with God. This stems from Gen 32, when Jacob wrestled with an angel of God until morning, who then crippled him by a supernatural touch. The angel blessed him with a new name, Israel, which means "God fights." All his life, Jacob had fought with God and men, conniving to get the blessing. From this point on, he would allow God to fight for him. His descendants received that same blessing, that God fought on their behalf – and their responsibility was to trust Him.

Adoption – the people of Israel were adopted as God's children. Starting with Abraham, God had said He would make a great nation, and that the whole earth would be blessed through it. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, it was with the message, "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me." (Ex 4:22-23) What was God's intent? We find it in Deut 28:9-10, "The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you." The adoption of Israel by God was connected to their obedience. David, in awe of God's blessings, prayed, "And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and awesome things, in driving out nations before your people whom you redeemed from Egypt? And you made your people Israel to be your people forever, and you, O Lord, became their God." (1 Chr 17:21-22) The adoption of Israel was a foreshadowing of our own adoption as believers, as we were told in 8:15.

Glory – As the chosen people of God, they were privileged to have His glorious presence in their midst. When they were at Mount Sinai to receive the Law, the glory of the Lord covered the mountain like a fire. When the tabernacle was erected according to God's instructions, "then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Ex 40:34) Likewise, when Solomon's temple was consecrated, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple." (2 Chr 7:1) When the people of Israel saw it, they responded by bowing their faces to the ground, saying "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." (2 Chr 7:3) The Psalms are replete with declarations of God's glory, and indications that Israel was to show His glory to the other nations of the earth.

Covenants – In the Abrahamic covenant, God promised to give the land to Abraham's seed, and to make of them a great nation. When He brought them out from Egypt, He led them to Mount Sinai, where He gave them the covenant of the Law, to guide them as His chosen people. Many years later, God established a covenant with David, saying that one of his offspring would be the king who reigns over Israel forever. Then, through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised to one day make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, when He would write His law within them, in their hearts, so they would truly be His people.

Law – As we already said, God established the covenant of the Law with His people at Sinai. In Deut 4, Moses said, "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and

take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you... And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" (4:1,8) The law of Moses stands out in history as the greatest model of just laws. Many nations have modeled their own laws on it. Why did God give it? Verse 10 says "so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so." The law establishes God's holy standard, and the consequences of violating it. Gal 3:24 says that the Law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ.

Worship – What does it mean to worship? First and foremost, the Hebrew word means "bow down." The worship of God starts when His people bow in humble submission to Him. That is what Israel was to teach the rest of the world. 1 Chr 16:29 describes other aspects of worship: "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." Worship is ascribing worth and glory to God; worship is the act of obeying Him through sacrifices and offerings. The ceremonies of the Tabernacle and the Temple gave us the framework of how to worship the Lord, and the Psalms of Israel provided the template for songs of worship.

Promises – How great and precious are the promises God gave to Israel! Promises of a land, a hope, a Messiah, a kingdom, a restoration after judgment – and on we could go. God told Jacob (Gen 28:15) "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." God previously promised Abraham to make of him a great nation, and to put them in the land of Canaan. God promised to drive out the people of the land before them, so they could take possession of it. After they took possession of the land, Joshua said (21:45) "Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass." Again in 1 Kgs 8:56, Solomon declared, "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant."

Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the Jewish race, were men singularly chosen by God to reveal Himself to mankind. They walked with God and received His promises.

Christ – He is the hope of the human race, the fulfillment of God's promises, the One we worship, the maker of the New Covenant, the incarnation of the Glory of God, the One who fulfilled the law. He descended from Israel as a human, yet is God from all eternity. He is the greatest blessing of all.

How many blessings did God give to Israel? And how many of those blessings have been passed down to us today? Truly, as God told Abraham, in him all nations of the earth have been blessed! And yet, for all those blessings, Paul's words carry a note of sadness, because Israel has not received her Messiah. We'll talk more of that next week, but for today, we praise and bless and worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because He has shown His faithfulness through His people Israel, and has extended His love and mercy to us, that we could become His children by faith.