

Sermon 96: The Privileges of the Jews

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INTRODUCTION

The question of who are the Jews and what is their part in the plan of God is a complex one to answer. The question is obscured by the anti-Semitism that has been unceasing in every age. We can identify the hatred of the Jews in Islam driven by a satanic theology. We have our view of the Jews tainted by the Aryan philosophy of Hitler. The history of the West comes from a Europe who marginalised the Jews, who suppressed them, ridiculed the, persecuted them, and if they converted to Christianity they were forced to take Christian names. That has made the list of the privileges of the Jews in 9:4-5 surprising to some and offensive to others.

Their place in God's plan is further complicated by the many questions that are forced upon us. Are the Jews as a nation still a distinct people of God? Can Jews still be saved apart from faith in Christ through a faithful practice of Judaism? Is the establishing of the present state of Israel God's fulfilling of the Abrahamic covenant and promises of the prophets? Are the atrocities committed by the Israeli army justified in the name of holy war like Joshua's purging of Canaan in the OT, do we view these wars religiously or politically? Will there be a large scale conversion of the Jews to Christ as a sign of the end before He comes again? Or is it part of what Dispensationalists call the Great Tribulation? Was the Holocaust God's judgement on the Jews for crucifying Jesus Christ? Will the temple be rebuilt and should Christians give of their money to such a project? Are we to prioritise Jewish evangelism above every other form of missions? What are we to think of Messianic congregations that are deliberately Jewish in culture and even worship? How are Jewish believers to be viewed in relation to Gentile believers? Should we be offended that our Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ call us Gentiles when this was a theological term that meant someone outside of the covenant? Are we children of Abraham with the Jews, do we have a joint inheritance with them, or are we still aliens to some promises and covenants? You will be sad or glad to know that we are not going to answer all of those questions in this sermon but these are the issues that we will have to address, and others, as we go through Romans 9-11.

Today we are going to look with Paul at the 9 privileges that the Jews had and yet they did not believe. Now we are warned in preaching school to never preach a sermon with 9 points, and I admit it is clumsy and cumbersome. However, let me highlight some general things I want you to see in these 9 points, and then we can quickly light upon each one. Firstly, an underlying principle that we have to have in all of our discussions is that God's goodness to Israel is as a gift of grace not as a reward for race. Grace and not race is the basis upon which God deals with anyone including the Jews. Paul's discussion on the basis of God's election in the rest of this chapter will confirm this. Secondly, we need to read each one of these privileges with NT eyes. In other words, we live after Christ and the New Covenant has exceeded and fulfilled what the Old Covenant was anticipating. Try and feel here with Paul the problem of the fact that the very things that he mentions in this list, adoption, glory, etc., that these things are the blessings that he has just told us that we as Gentiles have received in Christ. We have the Spirit of adoption and cry 'Abba, Father!' We taste more glory in Christ and have a more certain hope of glory. We are living in the Covenant that was promised to Abraham as children of Abraham by faith. The law has been fulfilled by Christ and we are no longer under its condemnation. We do not have the temple worship but the veil has been torn and we can go into the Holy of Holies through Christ. We will inherit all the promises which are yes and Amen in Christ. Gentile inclusion and the receiving of all these benefits heighten Paul's sorrow and the theological problem of why the Jews are unbelieving. We will want to show that the NT Christian stands in a more privileged position and is therefore more accountable than the OT Jew. Thirdly, we want to enter the sorrow of Paul as we consider each privilege and how it was another piece that anticipated Christ, something meant to find fulfilment in Him and yet they clung to the shadow and not the one casting the shadow.

Israelites

The first privilege is found in verse 4, 'They are Israelites.' This is like the big heading that we can write over the rest of the list. Following this are the next six privileges which you should visualise in two columns. In the first column is adoption, glory, covenants, and then a column next to it with corresponding blessings, law, worship and promises, so that adoption is linked with law, glory with worship and covenants with promise. This is followed by two climactic privileges, the patriarchs and better still they are the race from whom the Messiah of the world comes.

Now the designation Israelites is to be distinguished from the title Jew. By the time of Paul because of the way these terms were used in the inter-testamental period Jew was used to describe God's people nationally, but Israelite was used to describe them religiously. Paul seems to call God's OT Jews when distinguishing them Gentiles but Israelites when referring to them as a religious unit. The title Jew comes from the tribe of Judah and was the common name after the 10 Northern tribes split from the 2 Southern ones because Judah was bigger than Benjamin. The title Israelite comes from Jacob who was the father of the 12 tribes whose name was changed to Israel after he wrestled with God. This name was the blessing that God bestowed upon Jacob and a title that highlights God's favour.

Adoption

We see Israel called God's first born son in verses like Exodus 4:22-23, 'Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'" It is out of all the nations that God chose to set His grace upon Israel distinguishing them as His children, Deut. 14:1-2, "'You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. 2 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.' All of the benefits of being part of Israel were the benefits of this adoption. This adoption began when God saved them from Egypt. The adoption of Israel in the OT must however not be confused with the adoption that a Christian experiences in the New covenant. A significant difference is that in the NT adoption implies salvation and eternal glory where under the old Covenant there is no such certainty, Jesus Himself speaks about children of God under the OT adoption going to hell, Matt. 8:11-12, 'I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" However, in the NT we have Romans 8:28-39 that claims there is nothing that can separate us from Christ.

This is also one of the reasons why I am a Baptist. There is a definite difference between the adoption of the OT where unregenerate people could be adopted by default at birth and lose their adoption, and the NT adoption where one is justified upon adoption and cannot be separated from God. The temporary inclusive adoption of the OT has been exceeded by an adoption that is eternal. For this reason I cannot see the children of believers as children of God in the same way that OT believer's children were seen as adopted, there has been a change, a development in the nature of adoption that excludes unregenerate people from being adopted into the church.

Glory

Paul is here referring to the manifest presence of God among His people in the OT. One of the great privileges of the Israelites was that God would be their God and dwell in their midst. This was manifested through the pillar of fire and smoke, God's glory was manifested in a terrifying way at Mt Sinai when the 10 Commandments were given. When the Israelites constructed the tabernacle in the Wilderness God's manifest presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies. When Solomon dedicated the temple the people could not stand because of the presence of God in their midst. Israel was immensely privileged to have this partial re-enactment of Eden, a time and place where God and people could dwell together. More than that it is a marvel that a holy God could dwell in the midst of a sinful people and they were not killed outright. Which other nation could claim such a thing, all other nations had idols, mere statues, but Israel had the manifest presence and glory of God in their midst. It was all intended to picture what had been lost in Eden and would be regained in the new creation. Israel was further blessed by the glory of God when the Word became

flesh, John 1:14, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.'

The New Covenant after Pentecost experiences a greater glory where the Spirit of Christ enables every believer to have personal union with Christ; where every individual believer is a temple of God and we collectively as the church are also a temple. We may not experience the glory in as tangible a way as the Israelites did but where two or three are gathered there is Christ dwelling among His people.

The Covenants

Next Paul speaks about the covenants. There are various covenants in the Bible, there is the covenant that God made with Adam, there is the covenant that God made with Noah, but the covenants that Paul is referring to are the covenants made with Abraham, Moses and David which were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. God covenanted to be his God and the God of his offspring, to give him blessing, land and offspring. This covenant was repeated and expanded with Isaac, Jacob and Moses, and more detail was added with David. The covenants of course climax in Christ who fulfils them. Christ is the seed of Abraham who will realise the promise land not merely in a single nation but a new creation not merely in physical blessing but a new creation free of all sin and death, and not merely with lots of Jewish offspring but with a multitude from all nations. There is a fundamental unity between the various covenants and the Abrahamic covenant was not replaced with the Mosaic but supplemented, Paul puts it this way in Gal. 3:16-21 where we also see the purpose of adding the law, it was to be a schoolteacher preparing the Jews for Jesus, 'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

¹⁹Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

²¹Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.'

We see more info given when God repeat the covenant with David, we have extra information given that the Messiah will be from David's bloodline, 2 Sam. 14:12-17, 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your

house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'" 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.' We see that the NT sees all these covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus, this is what Zechariah the father of John the Baptist spoke by the Spirit, Luke 1:68-74, "'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear.'

Paul tells us that we as believing Gentiles along with believing Jews share in the fulfillments of these promises and covenants, Eph. 2:11-13, 'Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--- 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.'

Law

The giving of the law was a momentous occasion, there was the most terrifying theophany where God's presence was manifested in a dreadful way. The Israelites heard God's audible voice (Deut. 4:32-34). And they were given the 10 commandments drawn with God's own finger. The law we have just stated was a blessing in that it was a schoolmaster to direct the Jews towards Christ. The law was a constant mirror before them highlighting the ongoing need for atonement. Its regulations were never intended to be a way of salvation where by keeping them one could earn their way into heaven, but rather through the constant failure and need for the repeated sacrifices Israel was to deeply feel their need for a permanent solution that God would provide in Christ. Unfortunately Paul reveals that the Jews abused the law, being ignorant of the righteousness God would provide in Christ they tried to manufacture their own through obedience, Romans 10:3-4, 'For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.' It grieved Paul deeply that the very thing that should have directed them to Christ was turned into a Christ.

Worship

The worship is referring to the tabernacle and the sacrificial system. It was only ever intended to be temporary teaching by repetitious sacrifices that a greater sacrifice was needed, I can do no better than simply read Hebrews 9:1-14, 'Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. 2 For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. 8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.'

Promises

As with all the other items on this list the promises are preparation for Christ. The promise of a child born to Eve that would crush the head of the serpent; the promise of God blessing the nations through Abraham; the promise of God dwelling in the midst of His people; the promise of a sacrifice that would finally and decisively deal with sin; the promise of a Son of David sitting on the throne. All these and more were promises intended to be fulfilled by Christ. It is for this reason that Jesus is called the 'Son of David' and the 'Son of Abraham' in Matthew's genealogy at the beginning of the NT. However the Jews focused more on the laws than the promises and failed to see the Saviour God provided.

Patriarchs

Paul includes the patriarchs as a climactic blessing in this list, and rightly so. The patriarchs are the reason that God would be faithful to Israel, it would be on account of His promises to them that salvation would come and will come to the Jewish race. Listen to Romans 11:28 as a commentary on this point, 'As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For

the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.' Because God chose to set His love upon a moon worshipping non-Jew Abraham and made promises to him, God blessed Israel. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David, and it is in Christ that the Jewish nation today will receive the fulfilment of those promises not apart from Him.

Messiah

The ultimate blessing, the one which all the others were preparing for, the promise which has come is the promises saviour Jesus Christ. The saviour of the whole world comes from Jewish stock as touches His humanity, 'and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.' He is the one who was the promised Seed who would crush the head of satan; He is the one who would give Abraham's children not only the land of Israel but a new creation free from sin; He is the one who would ensure that Abraham would become a mighty people; He is the one who will see that the nations are blessed not only with physical blessings but with the greatest blessing of all eternal life; He is the promised Son of David who will crush not only human enemies but our greatest enemies in satan, sin and death as well. He is the one who God sent to keep the law where we could not, to die a death to pay for sin that we could not, so that if we will take Him as Lord and Saviour, that in Him we might be declared to be holy and free from the guilt of sin and sinful people can forever be reconciled to a holy God.

Paul is weeping because the very people who gave birth to the Messiah, the one who had been best prepared, better than all others do not follow Him. The tremendous tragedy of the situation evokes deep emotion in Paul. Let us stop and be silent and grasp some of the immensity of what is shaking Paul.

First let us heed some warnings. The very gifts of God, the very promises of God, the very law of God, the truest religion that had ever been until its time was taken by sinful men and corrupted and the religion that was intended to direct us to Christ, to illuminate Christ, to prepare us for Christ turned into an exercise in self salvation and not trusting in God. We can be surrounded by truth and our sinfulness and wilful blindness can fail to embrace the Christ that saves. This danger is as real today than it has ever been. The Jews failing to see how sinful they were and their need for God to save them by His provision turned that which was to be mirror to expose sin, the law, into a stairway to heaven. We can feel safe because we are in a church, a bible preaching church, that we exert ourselves to get our doctrines correct and feel self-righteous but not have the Christ that saves.

Secondly, the New Covenant surpasses the Old, our adoption is greater, our glory, the law on our hearts not merely stone, our worship, we have fulfilled promises and the Messiah has come. We are more accountable for rejecting this gospel than the Jews for failing to receive it. The Western world that has had an atmosphere of Christianity and has turned to other religions and saviours is worse than what the Jews did, they rejected the Christ for His shadow, the West rejects Christ for antichrists.

And can you now see how blessed we are? Can you see all that God has done in preparing to send the Saviour Jesus, and it is you and I who are saved? That all that preparation had did not lead to God abandoning the world in its sin but opening the gates of salvation to the nations. Salvation has come to the nations!

Can you see the overarching plan of God that was begun in eternity past, that we were given peeks into at Eden, Sinai, and Jerusalem? Can you see how God has been in control from the beginning and how Christ pulls together all the strands of Scripture in one big picture? Can you see how important it is to read the OT so that we can be enriched in our understanding of God's working?

With the sadness comes warning, with the blessing comes responsibility.