

## Are the Jews Really Special?

Exodus 19:5-6

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." NKJV

Deuteronomy 14:2

2 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.  
NKJV

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. NKJV

For ages, the Jews have been called the chosen people. How did they get such a title? Did they make it up themselves? The Bible has much to say about this. In Deuteronomy 7:6, we read this about the Jews:

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

8 but because the LORD loves you, NKJV

So it was God who chose the Jewish people. We might ask the question, Why the Jews? They are certainly not a plentiful people on earth, since they number somewhat over 13 million today, or less than one half of one percent of world population. Nor were they the largest or greatest people of antiquity. When we look at the Bible in Deuteronomy 7:7, we read that quite the opposite was the case:

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

### **THEIR CHOICE – WAS A SOVEREIGN ACT OF GOD**

The Bible makes it plain that the choice of the Jewish people was a sovereign act of God. God as the Creator of the universe has the right to choose whom he wills. In Romans 9:21, we see that he can choose the vessels he has made, whether men or nations, for honor or for dishonor.

Romans 9:21

21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? NKJV

**The potter...** This similitude is used only to show that we are not to dispute with our Maker, nor to reason with him why he does not give as much grace to one as to another; for since the whole lump of our clay is vitiated by sin, it is owing to his goodness and mercy, that he makes out of it so many vessels of honor; and it is no more than just, that others, in punishment of their unrepented sins, should be given up to be vessels of dishonor.

God does not play favorites however. The sovereign choice of Israel was for God's own redemptive purposes on earth. In his supreme wisdom he chose a family to influence families and a nation to influence nations. God chose Israel to introduce his word to the world. He chose them to be an example of His character to show that He is a God of love, but also of justice and judgment. God placed them on earth as a litmus test for the nations.

Matthew 25:40-45

40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' NKJV

Then in the fullness of time, God allowed Israel to bring forth his Messiah, in order that all nations could be blessed through him. God's choice bore with it a great amount of responsibility and it has resulted in an incredible degree of suffering for the Jewish people.

Romans 9:4-5

4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;

5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. NKJV

Because of this responsibility and suffering, there are many Jews today who would just as soon not be the chosen people. They echo the words of Tevye in the famous play, Fiddler on the Roof. After Tevye heard news about an impending pogrom (persecution) he had another one of his little talks with God, complaining to him: I know, I know we are the chosen people, but once in a while can't you choose someone else!?

We see from the scripture that the sovereign choice of the Jewish people goes back to Abram, in Genesis 12:1-3:

The LORD had said to Abram, Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.?

This divine choice of Abram and his heirs as a redemptive family in the earth, and later as a redemptive nation, is documented in numerous places in scripture. In Genesis 17:3-9 it is repeated to Abram, whose name is then changed to Abraham. In Genesis 26:2-5, it is repeated to Isaac. Then in Genesis 28:13-15 it is repeated to Jacob. References are made to this covenant in many other places, such as Leviticus 20:26, Psalm 105:8-11 and Amos 3:2.

### **A UNIQUE AND SPECIAL PEOPLE**

It is clear from scripture that the Jewish people are chosen in a unique and special sense. In the passage we quoted earlier in Deuteronomy 7:6, the Hebrew expression used for treasured possession is "Am se-gu-lah. It also has the meaning of peculiar or extraordinary people.

Deuteronomy 7:6 You are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. He chose you to be his own special possession out of all the nations on earth.

Balaam, who has been referred to by the Jews as the first Gentile prophet, has this to say about the Jews in Numbers 23:9:

<sup>9</sup> I see them from the top of rocky cliffs, I look at them from the hills. I see a nation that lives by itself, a people who do not consider themselves to be like other nations.

<sup>10</sup> The descendants of Jacob are like specks of dust. Who can count them or number even one-fourth of the people of Israel?

Israel is not considered a part of all the other nations, but a unique entity all by itself. In addition, we see an amazing fact about Israel in Deuteronomy 32:8:

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.

This is a puzzling and astonishing verse. It seems to mean that when the Almighty marked out the nations of the world, he did so in reference to the number of Jewish people. Possibly he did this in reference to the Jews who would live in these very nations.

We learn more in Psalm 148:14 about the special nature of the Children of Israel. The Psalm reads:

He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.

Of all the people on the face of the earth, only the people of Israel and those grafted into it are described as being close to God's very heart. What a special place and privilege!

Because of God's redemptive choice, he did not choose other people in the same way he chose Israel. In Psalm 147:19-20, we are surprised to read:

He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD.

Why does the Psalmist say, "Praise the Lord" after making a statement like this? It is probably because he realized that the Jewish people would keep God's word intact and deliver it safely to coming peoples throughout history. God once said of Abraham in Genesis 18:19:

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

The idea here may well be better expressed in the King James Version. It is the thought that God knew Abraham and thus chose him. God knew that Abraham would command his children after him regarding the ways of the Almighty.

The idea is still prevalent in Israel that one must guard the commands of God and keep them (shomer mitzvot). Many Israelis believe strongly that they must carefully instruct their children to also guard the things of the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 11:19-20, the Jewish people are commanded to teach the word of God when they rise up, when they sit down, and when they walk. They are also taught to write the word of God upon their doorposts and gates. The fulfillment of this command can be seen today in the many mezuzot on doorposts of Jewish homes in Israel.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21

18 "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

19 You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

20 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,

21 that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. NKJV

We might wonder what would have happened if God had given his precious word to the nations at large. How would they have handled the word over the last 3500 years? The answer seems to

be apparent. We Gentiles have had the word for approximately half that amount of time and many are already busily corrupting it.

Consider some of the ideas floating around about the scriptures today. Some people are trying to make God feminine. Others are trying to remove every reference to Zion and Israel in order to make the Bible politically correct. Thank God that he gave the word to the Jewish people. They have faithfully delivered it intact to us.

### **CAN GOD CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE?**

Since the early centuries of Christianity there have been voices proclaiming in the Church that God is finished with the Jews. Can such a thing be? According to this theology the Jews failed God, so the Lord has washed his hands of them forever. Can God cast away his people? The scripture is clear on this. God knew beforehand that Israel would not be faithful. He also knows the same thing about us Christians. In Leviticus 26:14-43, Moses speaks in detail about all of Israel's failures. Yet, in verse 44, God still says of them:

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God.

Leviticus 26: 13 I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of Egypt so that you are no longer slaves of the Egyptians. I have broken their power over you and made you live as a free people.

#### **God's Curses for Those Who Break His Laws**

<sup>14</sup> “If you will not listen to me and obey all these commands,

<sup>15</sup> if you reject my laws and look at my rules with disgust, if you reject my promise by disobeying my commands,

<sup>16</sup> then this is what I will do to you: I will terrorize you with disease and fever. You will suffer from eye problems and depression. You will plant your crops and get nothing because your enemies will eat them.

<sup>17</sup> I will condemn you so that you will go down in defeat in front of your enemies. Those who hate you will be your rulers. You will run away even when no one is chasing you.

<sup>18</sup> “If you still will not listen to me, I will discipline you seven times for your sins.

<sup>19</sup> I will crush your arrogance. You will have no rain, and your land will be as hard as cement.

<sup>20</sup> You will work hard for nothing because your land will produce no crops and the trees will produce no fruit.

<sup>21</sup> “If you resist and don't listen to me, I will increase the punishment for your sins seven times.

<sup>22</sup> I will send wild animals among you. They will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle, and make you so few that your roads will be deserted.

<sup>23</sup> “If this discipline does not help and you still resist,

<sup>24</sup> then I, too, will resist you. I will punish you seven times for your sins.

<sup>25</sup> I will bring war on you to get revenge for my promise {that you rejected}. When you gather in your cities, I will send plagues on you and you will fall under the control of your enemy.

This is a rather shocking passage. It simply means that God has never changed his mind about the Jews. Still today, almost 2700 years after the beginning of their exiles in 722 BC, they are still his people. Those Jewish people whom we have known, associated with, and often persecuted are still a special people to God. Whenever we touch them, we touch *... the apple of his eye?* (Zech. 2:8).

God speaks to us of their continuing special relationship to him in yet another passage. God, who is the Creator of the vast universe above us and the earth below us declares in Jeremiah 31:35-37:

This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar? the LORD Almighty is his name: *... Only if these decrees vanish from my sight, ... declares the LORD, ... will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me. ...* This is what the LORD says: *... Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done, ... declares the LORD.*

When the sun stops shining; when the stars stop twinkling in the heavens; and when the waves of the sea stop roaring, then there might be a possibility that God can reject his chosen people Israel. Until that time they remain chosen and we Christians need to come to understand this. The New Testament verifies this truth to us in Romans 11:29 as Paul assures us, *... God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ...*

*... All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?? (American author, Mark Twain)<sup>1</sup>*

Paul asks and answers his own question about the Jews in Romans 11:1-2. He is almost aghast at the thought that God could forsake them: *... Did God reject his people? By no means! ... God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew...?*

## **CHOSEN PEOPLE - CHOSEN LAND**

God chose a special people, the people of Israel, and a special land, the land of Israel. Once more after two thousand years we see the chosen people inhabiting the chosen land.

It may surprise many today in our modern world that God gave this special land to his special people. It was given to them as an eternal inheritance. Let us look at this eternal promise in Genesis 17:8:

Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Some have objected saying that all God's promises are conditional. Some of God's promises do have a conditional nature about them. Each generation may or may not receive the benefits of

these promises and covenants, depending upon its faithfulness or lack of it. However, the promises themselves are eternal and this fact is stated plainly in the above passage and in numerous other places.

In Genesis 15:9-21, God made the covenant with Abram to give him all the land of Canaan, from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates. As was the custom in ancient times, animals were slaughtered in the traditional fashion of a blood covenant. The bloody parts were then laid out so that the makers of the covenant could pass between them. Interestingly, Abram fell into a deep sleep and God alone passed between the parts, signifying that it is God alone who maintains the covenant.

God is very emphatic about giving the land of Israel to his chosen people forever. Not only does Israel have the "title deed" fully written out in Genesis 17:8, but in a real sense, the title has been legally recorded and published in the Bible so that all the world can know of its existence.

God does not stop here. God even goes to the extreme of swearing an oath about this. We have reference to this oath in Genesis 24:7:

The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land...?.'

This must be something very important for the God of the whole universe, that he would swear an oath about it. Let us pause and try to get this incredible picture.

Imagine the Almighty standing before all the angels, heavenly beings, principalities, powers and saying something like this: "I God Almighty do solemnly swear that the land of Israel shall be the possession of the children of Israel forever!"

Now the Bible tells us that there was no one greater by whom God could swear, so he swore by his own great name (Heb. 6:13-14). Perhaps as in the movie "O God," he just put his hand on his own shoulder and said, "So help me - me!"

### **BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ARABS?**

It is important for us to notice that God specifically did not give his land to Ishmael or to his descendants, the Arabs (Gen 17:21).

Genesis 17:19-22

19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.

20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time

next year."

22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. NKJV

This is the core of the problem in the Middle East today. Does it mean that God discriminated against Ishmael and the Arabs? Absolutely not!

God greatly loved Ishmael and he loves the Arabs today. God promised to surely bless Ishmael and multiply him into twelve princes and to make him great (Gen. 17:18-20). In fact, God has loved Ishmael so much that he has given him twenty-two sovereign nations that make up the Arab League. He has given the Arab League almost five million square miles as compared with only eight thousand square miles in Israel.<sup>2</sup>

God loved Ishmael so much that he has made him incredibly rich. Today, 67 percent of the world's oil reserves are located in the Arab Middle Eastern countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, and United Arab Emirates.<sup>3</sup> God has blessed Ishmael with abundant land and fantastic wealth, but he has not given him Israel, and he will not do so for all time and eternity.

Does this mean that the Arabs cannot live in Israel? Of course not! Some Arabs have been living in the land since the Muslim conquest of the seventh century. They have every right to live in the land. However, the issue is not one of living in the land but of sovereignty.

Certainly Gentiles may come and live in the land and even be protected by Israel's laws. However, as Gentiles we must realize that we have a responsibility to Israel to respect and act according to the laws and customs of the land.

If we believe the Bible, we must believe that God is a bit upset by what is happening today. The land of Israel has become a political hot potato. There is much agitation throughout the Middle East for Palestinian sovereignty in the territory of Israel. This agitation is seen and heard constantly in the media and it resounds in many foreign capitals.

Many of the nations of the earth and their leaders are now working feverishly to separate the people of Israel from the land of Israel. Through this effort known as the "peace process." Israel has already lost control of Shechem, Hebron, Bethlehem and several other important cities in its mountainous area. The Israeli government is now surrendering vast amounts of territory in this area, and much of the ancient land has been lost. This mountainous area is to be the very area of Israel's return and resettlement according to the prophet Ezekiel (36:1-15).

What will God eventually do about this problem? In Joel 3:2 we read these sobering verses:

I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.

It is clear that judgment is coming for people and nations who do not respect the word of God.

## TODAY, GOD IS VERIFYING HIS COVENANT

If we had lived a hundred years ago we might have had cause to wonder if God would be true to the Jewish people. At that time they were hopelessly scattered over the world. The idea of a Jewish homeland was just the dream of a few visionaries.

However, today God has moved with a mighty hand to re-establish his chosen people in his chosen land. He has restored their cities, their farmlands, their language, their military power, their government, etc. He has done this in spite of much interference and outright opposition of men and nations. In our day God has fulfilled dozens of prophecies such as Isaiah 11:11; Isaiah 43:5-6; Jeremiah 32:15, etc. It is now possible to come to Israel and see for oneself what God has done for his people.

Isaiah 11:11

11 It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. NKJV

Isaiah 41:8-10

8 "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend.

9 You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away:

10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' NKJV

Isaiah 43:5-6

5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west;

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth — NKJV

Jeremiah 32:15

15 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land." NKJV

How ironic it is, that at a time like this, a time of restoration, that there are those who teach that God has broken his covenant with Israel! Those are the voices who are adherents of Replacement Theology.

God's dealing with the Jewish people should be a cause for great confidence among Christians. Quite simply, if God remains faithful to his Old Covenant people, then he will also remain faithful to his New Covenant people. If God is capricious with Israel, then he could certainly act the same way with the Church couldn't He?

Thank God that he is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. In Psalm 94:14 we read: For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.

In fact, God's dealing with Israel after all these thousands of years is really a great proof of his existence. There is a story of Friedrich the Great of Prussia. He was an atheist but had a very pious medical doctor. Once, he demanded of his doctor: Give me proof that there is a God! But hurry up, I have no time! The doctor replied immediately: The Jews, Your Majesty!<sup>4</sup>

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

Why did God choose the Jewish people above all other people?

How does this fit with the scripture in Acts 10:34-35, that God is no respecter of persons?

Are God's promises to Israel unconditional or are they conditional and based upon Israel's obedience? Read Hosea 1-3 before formulating your answer.

Some Arabs have lived in the land of Israel for centuries, even before Israel became a nation in 1948. Some areas are predominately Arab. Should these Arab people now have a right to declare their own sovereignty? Give a reason for your answer.