

Romans Session 34

The Advantage of Being Jewish

Romans 3:1-8 (NASB)

¹ *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?*

² *Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

³ *What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?*

⁴ *May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."*

⁵ *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)*

⁶ *May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?*

⁷ *But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?*

⁸ *And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.*

If we were to look at the rather tragic history of the Jewish people, one is not inclined to think there has been any advantage in being a Jew.

In spite of the reality that they are such a noble strain of humanity and chosen by God, their history has been a saga of slavery, hardship, warfare, persecution, slander, captivity, dispersion, and humiliation.

They were menial slaves in Egypt for some four hundred years, and after God miraculously delivered them, they wandered in a barren wilderness for forty years, until an entire generation died out.

When they eventually entered the land God had promised them, they had to fight to gain every square foot of it and continue to fight to protect what they gained.

After several hundred years, civil war divided the nation. The northern kingdom eventually was almost decimated by Assyria, with the remnant being taken captive to that country.

Later the Southern kingdom was conquered and exiled in Babylon for seventy years, after which some were allowed to return to Palestine.

Then, not to long after they rebuilt their homeland, they were conquered by Greece, and the despotic Antiochus Epiphanes reveled in desecrating their Temple. Corrupting their sacrifices, and slaughtering their priests.

Under Roman rule they fared no better. Tens of thousands of Jewish rebels were publicly crucified and under Herod the Great scores of male Jewish babies were slaughtered because of His insane jealousy of the Christ child.

In the year AD 70, the Roman General Titus Vespasian carried out Caesar's order to utterly destroy Jerusalem, its Temple, and most of its citizens.

According to Josephus, over a million Jews of all ages were mercilessly butchered, and some 100,000 of those who survived were sold into slavery or sent to Rome to die in the gladiator games.

Two years previously, Gentiles in Caesarea had killed 20,000 Jews and sold many more into slavery. During that same period of time, the inhabitants of Damascus cut the throats of 10,000 Jews in a single day.

In AD 115 the Jews of Cyrene, Egypt, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia rebelled against Rome. And when they failed, Emperor Hadrian destroyed 985 towns in Palestine and killed at least 600,000 Jewish men.

Thousands more perished from starvation and disease.

So many Jews were sold into slavery that the price of an able bodied male slave dropped to that of a horse.

In the year 380 Emperor Theodosius 1 formulated a legal code that declared Jews to be an inferior race of human beings, a demonic idea that strongly permeated most of Europe for over a thousand years and that even persists in many parts of the world in our own day.

For some two centuries the Jews were oppressed by the Byzantine branch of the divided Roman Empire. Emperor Heraclitus banished them from Jerusalem in 628 and later tried to exterminate them.

Leo the Assyrian gave them the choice of converting to Christianity or being banished from the realm.

When the first crusade was launched in 1096 to recapture the Holy Land from the Ottoman Turks, the crusaders slaughtered countless thousands of Jews on their way to Palestine, brutally trampling many to death under their horse's hooves.

That carnage, of course, was committed in the name of Christianity.

In 1254 King Louis IX banished all Jews from France.

When many later returned to that country, Philip the Fair expelled 100,000 of them again in 1306.

In 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain even as Columbus began his first voyage across the Atlantic, and four years later they were expelled from Portugal as well.

Soon most of Western Europe was closed to them except for a few areas in northern Italy, Germany and Poland.

Although the French Revolution emancipated many Jews, vicious anti-Semitism continued to dominate most of Europe and parts of Russia.

Thousands of Jews were massacred in the Ukraine in 1818.

In 1894, because of growing anti-Semitism in the French Army, a Jewish officer named Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason, and that charge was used as an excuse to purge the military of all Jews of high rank.

Then when a number of influential Jews began to dream of re-establishing homeland in Palestine, the Zionist movement was born, its first congress being convened in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897.

By 1914, some 90,000 Jews had settled in Palestine.

In the unparalleled Nazi holocaust of the early 1940s at least 6,000,000 Jews were exterminated, this time for racial rather than religious reasons.

In our society anti-Semitism is seldom expressed so openly, Jews in many parts of the world still suffer for no other reason than their Jewishness.

From the purely historical perspective, therefore, Jews have been among the most continuously and harshly disadvantaged people in all time.

Not only have Jews historically had little social or political security, but in Romans Paul declares that although they are God's specially chosen and blessed people, Jews did not even have guaranteed spiritual security.

Romans 2:17-20 (NASB)

¹⁷ *But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,*

¹⁸ *and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,*

¹⁹ *and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,*

²⁰ *a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,*

Paul says that being born of Abraham's lineage or knowing God Law, or being circumcised did not assure them a place in heaven.

In fact, rather than protecting Jews from God's judgment, those blessings made them all the more accountable for obedience to the Lord.

Paul having demolished all the false securities on which most Jews relied, Paul knew they would come back with strong arguments and objections to his teachings.

He had confronted Jewish objections from the beginning of His ministry

Illustration; when he took some young Jewish Christians into the temple. They thought he had brought in some Greeks

Acts 21:28 (NASB)

²⁸ *crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."*

It was because of his teaching that the church leaders told Paul to take the young Christians into the temple for purificational cleansing to show the Jews there that he had not forsaken the teachings of Moses.

And as he stood before King Agrippa Paul said;

Acts 26:19-22 (NASB)

¹⁹ *"So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,*

²⁰ *but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.*

²¹ *"For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.*

²² *"So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;*

The Apostle did not teach that Jewish heritage and the Mosaic Law ceremonies were not important. Why because they were God given, they had tremendous importance.

But not so much in Paul's day, and never had been the means of satisfying the divine standard of righteousness.

They did provide the Jews great spiritual advantages, but they did not provide spiritual security.

After his conversion, Paul continued to worship in the temple when he was in Jerusalem and faithfully practiced the moral teachings of the Mosaic Law. He personally circumcised Timothy, who was Jewish on his mother's side, as a concession to the Jews in the region of Galatia

Acts 16:1-3 (NASB)

¹ *Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,*

² *and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.*

³ *Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

Paul even committed to following many of the ceremonial customs and the rabbinical patterns in order not to give undue offense to legalistic Jews, as noted in Acts 21

Acts 21:24-26 (NASB)

²⁴ *take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.*

²⁵ *"But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."*

²⁶ *Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.*

The essence of Paul's preaching was that none of those outward acts have any saving benefit and that a person can become right with God only through trust in His Son Jesus Christ.

It was that teaching and that truth of salvation only by God's grace working through man's faith that the unbelieving Jews found intolerable, because it exposed the worthlessness of their traditions and the hypocrisy of their ostentatious devotion to God.

Self-righteous, self-satisfied Jews could not stand any attack on their supposed Abrahamic security and their man-made legalism.

The Apostle had learned from all these experiences that unbelieving Jews would always accuse him of teaching against God's chosen people, against God's promises to His people, and against God's purity.

It will be those three objections now that he confronts when we come back to study again the next time.