

God's Sovereignty and the Choosing of Israel

Why did God choose the people of Israel to be a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation” (Ex. 19:6, ESV)? Was it because of something inherently good in them? Was it because they were better than other peoples? The Lord answered this question directly, saying, “The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:7–8, NIV).

Paul addressed this as well, writing, “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:15-16).

In short, Israel was chosen because of the sovereignty of God, not because of Israel’s own merit.

He set His love on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and determined to bless the world through their offspring, meaning through the people of Israel and ultimately, through the seed of Abraham par excellence, Jesus the Messiah. And because He made unconditional promises to the patriarchs, He has kept His word through the generations, preserving the people of Israel, disciplining them, scattering them and regathering them.

That’s the only reason we are still here (I say this as a Jewish person myself), and that’s why we are back in the land of Israel today. This is by the sovereign will of God.

As He stated explicitly, “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 Israel ever cease being 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’” (Jer. 31:35–37).

There you have it. Israel will be preserved as a people no matter what.

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We have been (and will be) judged and punished for our sins. But we will be preserved. So says the Lord.

As for Israel boasting in its own righteousness, the Lord actually said to the prophet Ezekiel, “You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel—not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate” (Ezek. 3:5–7).

In short, He said, “If I sent you to prophesy to the nations, they would listen. But not My own chosen people!”

Paul reiterated this in the clearest possible terms, writing to Gentile Christians in Rome, “As far as the gospel is concerned, they [meaning the people of Israel who rejected Jesus as Messiah] are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29).

Israel remains elect and chosen for God's sovereign purpose and plan. Israel still has a mission in the earth.

This does not mean that individual Jews are guaranteed salvation. Not for a moment. All of us, Jew and Gentile alike, have fallen short because of our sins, and all of us need mercy through the cross.

But this does mean that, despite Israel's failings, God's giftings to them remain intact, and His election of them remains secure. He does not change His mind.

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This should be a great comfort to Christians, a visible demonstration in the earth of the faithfulness of God. If He makes a promise, He will keep it, despite our failings and sins and shortcomings.

We stand by His goodness, not our own, by His mercy, not our righteousness. We too live by grace.

Unfortunately, many Christians take umbrage at the idea that the Jewish people are still chosen in any way, despite the explicit testimony of Scripture. They see this as somehow unfair.

To the contrary, God's choosing of Israel is a reminder of His sovereignty, a testimony to His perseverance and an ongoing, real-life example of the promise-keeping nature of our Lord.

Rather than grumbling about this, we should rejoice, recognizing that if God could break His promises to Israel, He could break His promises to the church.

Thank God that is not who He is, and when you look at Israel today—the people worldwide and the nation in the Middle East—you're looking at the sovereignty of God in action, right

until this moment.

He can be trusted—fully.

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