

JEW, GREEKS, AND THE CHURCH

“Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32)

Everyone knows that from the beginning God designated a special lineage of people to bring Jesus into the world. This Messianic Lineage is listed in Luke 3:23 – 38. It starts with Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, and stretches all the way back to God Who created Adam and placed him in Eden. Not everyone, of course, could be an ancestor of Jesus. Noah, for example, had three sons, but only Shem was selected. Abraham also had more than one son but only Isaac was selected. Jacob had 12 sons but only Judah was selected. The descendants of Judah came to be known as Jews but that name came to be associated with all the other sons of Jacob as well. For example, in Esther 2:5 we are told that Mordecai was a Jew even though he came from the tribe of Benjamin. Therefore when wicked Haman determined to kill all of the Jews throughout the whole earth (Esther 3:13), that decree was designed to kill all the children of Israel. Had he done so Jesus would not have been born.

Even though the Jews were scattered among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other, they have still managed to maintain their special identity (Deut. 28:64). Thus when the Emperor Claudius ordered the Jews to leave Rome it was easy to identify them (Acts 18:2). Today, after the passing of twenty centuries, the same is still true. No matter where on earth they live, the Jews have remained a separate and distinct people. Hence, even after the church was founded, God continued to recognize the Jews in a category all their own. The book of Romans seems to indicate that this special identity will continue until the “full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25).

Please note these facts from Romans chapter 11:

- The fall of the Jews is not beyond recovery (vs.11).
- If their loss meant riches for the Gentiles, how much greater their fullness (vs. 12).
- Paul wanted to arouse the Jews to envy so they could be saved (vs. 14).
- Their new acceptance will be like life from the dead (vs. 15).
- The Jews are like natural branches but were broken off because of unbelief. Gentiles are like wild olive shoots that are grafted in contrary to nature (vss. 17 – 24).
- As natural branches, it is easier to graft the Jews back in, than it was for Gentiles (vs. 24).
- As we said, the hardening of the Jews, in part, will continue until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (vs. 25).
- After this all Israel will be saved (vs. 26).
- God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable (vs. 29).

God has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the specific purpose of preparing God’s people for service (Eph. 4:9 – 13). Our goal is to gain maturity so that we will attain to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ultimately, we are to have the mind of Christ and think like Jesus thought (Phil. 2:5). The point is, if God considers the Jews to be in a special category, namely “Jews, Greeks, and the church of God”. Perhaps we should think of them as God does!

Yes! There is a sense in which believers are now the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). This was true, however, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In that letter God still placed the Jews in a category of their own. Even though believers are now the “true Jews” and the “true circumcision” is of the heart (Rom. 2:28, 29), we should still look at modern Jews in the same way that God does. Even though we consider them as a special group distinct from Greeks and the church, they still cannot be saved unless they come to believe in Christ. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one can come to the Father except through Him!

God is Sovereign and can choose anybody He wants to. He did not choose to love the descendants of Abraham because they were more numerous than other people. In fact, they were the “fewest of all the people” (Deut. 7:7). This is still true today! There are only slightly over 14 million Jews in all the world. But if God chose to love the Jews in days gone by, perhaps we should choose to love them too! If God considers them special, maybe we should consider them special too!