

Part 1: The Narrative

In the portion of the video we just watched, we heard a crash course on the history of the people of Israel. They failed over and over again, yet God's love for them is amazing. His desire for them was clearly not attached to their faithfulness. They failed almost every step of the way: from the original 12 sons of Israel (Jacob) being a sinful mess, to the rampant sinning in the wilderness after they had been delivered by God from Egypt, to the downward spiral throughout the book of Judges after they had entered the land.

All throughout the Bible we see that God chooses certain people to bless. He picked Noah. He picked Abraham. He picked Jacob over Esau. He favored the Israelites in wars over other people. No matter what they did, He was committed to His promises.

It can make us very uncomfortable that God chooses to bless some and not others. This has a tendency to offend us, as humans, because it's not how we would do it. Most of us would have moved on.

1 Why do you think this would offend us? Does it offend you?

In our flesh, we want to be in a place of judgment over God, telling Him what He is and is not allowed to do. We feel like He should have to answer to us. But the reality is that God does what God wants. That's what makes Him God. He doesn't owe us explanations and doesn't need our approval (see the book of Job).



Also, in our flesh we feel it is safer to be in control of our own lives. We want to be God. Yet we don't have to look far into our past (or even present) to see how we can't even manage our own lives without God. We make a mess of things. This actually gets down to the root of Israel's problem. The author of Judges creates a theme to Israel's problem by stating twice that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25). This is at the root of humanity's problem. Humans ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thus ushering in our tendency to want to decide what is right and wrong on our own.

2 Do you agree that we desire to be in control and make judgments separate from God? If so, how do you see that play out?

3 How are we to deal with this issue in our hearts?

God chose the people of Israel uniquely from all other people. They had failed over and over again, even to the point of God destroying them, yet still God wasn't done with them. When Jesus came to the Earth, it was for the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). God still wanted them. The Bible says that we (Gentiles) have been "grafted in" to the tree (Romans 11:17). That tree is Israel. We have been added into the favor that God shows to Israel through Jesus and the New Covenant.

Human nature leads us to be skeptical when others are shown grace, but thankful when we are shown grace personally. When we say that Israel has unmerited favor from God, it can create quite a stir. But let's not forget that WE have such great, unmerited favor from God! For those who have placed their faith and hope in Jesus, we have been included in the great promises ("grafted in"). There are many demons (and probably people) in our past who could look at us and say, "God, you shouldn't forgive and love them!". And they would have a great argument. Yet, praise God that He does what He wants! The only reason we are saved today is because He chose us despite all of our foolishness and evil hearts.



- 4** Are you thankful that God does what He wants? Think about your lowest moments in life. Do you think it made sense that God kept loving you and pursuing you? Spend some time praising God for His kindness and patience.
- 5** How does reflecting on God's mercy, patience, and goodness to you in spite of your consistent failings help shape your perspective on Israel?

It's extremely clear that only those who have believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins will receive salvation and avoid the punishment of Hell after this life. Please understand that we are not arguing that Jewish people, apart from Jesus, can go to Heaven. What we are wrestling with is whether God still has promises and a pursuit of the Jewish people that is unique to them. Does God still have a unique love for the Jewish people that we need to pay attention to?

Scripture seems to consistently highlight that, though salvation is clearly only found in Jesus, God is faithful to His promises to the line of Abraham. He still has His promises to them. Israel was destroyed in AD 70 and dispersed over the years following, but God's love for them hasn't stopped.

- 6** How should seeing God's heart for the Jewish people affect us today? What might be some tangible shifts needed in our hearts for Israel in light of seeing these truths? How might we pray for them as a people? How can we study and appreciate more about this historically significant land?

Remember, the point of this study is not a political one. God loves and is saving people from all nations and backgrounds. He loves Muslim people in the Middle East whose nations are currently in political tension with the nation of Israel. Studies show that the church is actually growing at a very fast rate among them as Jesus is appearing to them and saving many.





There are two significant differences between the Old Testament and our present day that are important to state here:

First, Jesus fulfilled many of the Old Testament prophecies about a New Covenant, and His life and then death on the cross ushered in the Church Age. This era includes people from every tribe, nation, and tongue in a way that was not present in the Old Testament.

Second, in the Old Testament, the people of God were essentially confined to the nation of Israel. This is no longer the case as the people of God are a dispersed people group among all nations. So, while God commanded Israel to go to war and totally destroy certain people groups in the Old Testament, we are in a very different era in which Jesus commands us to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

We are not to be those sucked into the politically charged spirit of the world that wants to pick which nations are good and which are bad. There is bad and good in every person and in every nation. There are believers in Jesus and unbelievers in every nation. Our heart is that we want to see Jesus reign; we want His kingdom to come on Earth as it is in Heaven. We pray for these things.

- 7** How, then, should we pray in light of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the New Covenant in which we currently live? How does that mesh with the new things we are learning about Israel?

Reflection

Action