

**EIGHT AMAZING PRIVILEGES**  
**OF GOD'S PEOPLE:**  
**A BIBLE STUDY OF ROMANS 9:4-5**  
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# CHAPTER ONE: THE ADOPTION

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**H**ave you ever thought about adoption? The adoption referred to is found in Romans 9:4. Perhaps you hadn't noticed this little gem tucked away near the middle of Paul's letter to the Romans, but it is a tremendous description of what it meant to be among God's people in the past. We are not so much interested in a history lesson, of course, but in seeing to what extent each of these great privileges, and eight are listed, can find its answer today in our service for God.

Romans 9:4-5 is speaking of the Jewish people, Paul says, "who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God, Amen." After Adolph Hitler had occupied Poland, the Nazis arrived at one of the villages and began rounding up Jews. At that moment, a woman was doing her shopping not far from the station. There German soldiers were herding Jews into wagons for transportation to the dreaded concentration camps. The woman shopper watched as a German soldier pushed a Jewish woman towards the station. A young girl was straggling along not far behind her. The German suddenly stopped and asked the Jewish woman if that was her daughter. Terrified, and looking straight into the eyes of the shopping woman who was walking past just then, she replied, 'No, the child is her daughter.' From that mo-

ment, the woman who was in fact a complete stranger took the little Jewish girl home as her own daughter. By responding quickly and compassionately that day she saved the little girl from almost certain death in one of the camps.

Think of our situation. We, too, were condemned. Not as innocent victims, but as guilty sinners before a Holy God. Our fate was death, the second death: the wages of sin, being eternal separation from the God who loves us. There was nothing unjust about that fate, but, by calling out to God, in grace and mercy He received us as His own, saving us like the Jewish girl in our story from a fate worse than death. But you might say: 'I am confused as to whether the Bible teaches that I was born into God's family or whether He adopted me. Surely it cannot be both, for we do not need adopting by God if we are already His children by the new birth, do we?' It is correct to say that we became God's children by birth at the time of our salvation. For that is what John 1:12 says: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." However, the New Testament also says, in Galatians 4:4, that "God sent forth His Son ... that we might receive the adoption as sons."

And with this Ephesians 1:4 agrees when it tells us that we were predestined "to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ," who, the passage goes on to say, "is the guarantee of our inheritance" (v.14). So it definitely is a case of both! We learn that we became God's children by birth; whereas we become His sons by adoption. If the adoption of one's own children seems strange to us, we need to look a little more carefully into the original meaning and cus-

tom in the Roman world. The biblical word 'adoption' in the verses we have been quoting actually means 'son-placing.' That is more accurate, referring to the placing of a son. Its use is rooted in the Roman custom by which the father, the head of the household, took his own child, when the boy had reached the age of twelve, and formally adopted him as his legal heir.

This much, in fact, is fairly clear from Paul's words to the Galatians in chapter 4, which we have already quoted. He goes on to say: "the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave ..."; then spiritually applying this illustration to us, he follows up by saying, "you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." In those days the child was no better off than a slave, until, at twelve years of age, he was placed as a son in the full legal position of being his father's heir. What is in view in this biblical word 'adoption' is not so much a change of nature as a change of status. When we are 'born of the Spirit' at salvation, that means a different nature is created within us; but adoption, adoption as sons by Jesus Christ, has to do with our obtaining a different dignity - in other words, these are separate aspects of our experience at salvation. So the term adoption when used in its biblical sense has to do with inheritance, becoming a legal heir. It is absolutely marvellous to think that, by God's grace, He not only saves us from hell but makes us His heirs, joint-heirs with Christ.

Christ is the appointed Heir of all things, Hebrews says, and He is God's Heir by right; whereas in our case it is all of God's grace. Ephesians 1 mentions both adoption and inheritance. We might ask, 'what is this inheritance it is talking about?' This brings us back to the point in Romans 9:4 again, which was our starting

point. I believe Ephesians chapter 1 speaks of two different inheritances. In verse 14 where it speaks of the Lord Jesus as the guarantee of our inheritance, or as the older versions put it, the Lord as the one in whom we have been made a heritage, it is talking about our future heavenly inheritance in Christ. But, a few verses later on, when we come down the chapter to verse 18, Paul's prayer is that the eyes of our understanding be enlightened that we may know the hope of His [God's] calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

Now saints are nothing but saved sinners, so when it says "His inheritance in the saints" it means God's inheritance in us. Earlier, we saw it was a matter of our inheritance in Christ; now it is a matter of God's inheritance in us. The first is future, heavenly and secure; while the second, God's inheritance in us, is a present, earthly possibility for us to enjoy as well as God. This is something very wonderful and yet so easily lost sight of today. We concentrate on the former, what Christ has done for us, and rightly so; but perhaps we don't pay enough attention to what we can be for Him, what we can be for God that is His inheritance as opposed to our inheritance. As far back as Deuteronomy 32:9 we read in our Bibles that: "The LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance."

This is set at the period of the Exodus of the Israelites from the land of Egypt, concerning which we have the commentary in Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt I called My son". Notice how we are right back in thought now to the adoption of Romans 9:4, the adoption that belonged to Israel, God's ancient people: "Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption," we read. God adopted Israel then as His son; they were His portion, His inheritance.

That is why God brought them out of Egypt, it was so that they might serve Him collectively as His people: “Let My people go that they might serve Me” was the message Moses had to bring to Pharaoh. God’s message has always been as we find it in 2 Corinthians 6:17: “Come out from among them and be separate ... and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters.”

Like Israel, to whom the adoption once belonged in this sense, we, too, have been saved in order that we might serve God as part of His called-together people, those who are separate from everything that is opposed to the will of God for the service of His people. Here we have an aspect of adoption that is collective, one that cannot be fully expressed by individual Christians, but only as by our obedience, by our faithfulness to the pattern of teaching in God’s Word for our service, we enter in among the service of the people of God today.

It might be asked, ‘How does the mention of “My sons and daughters” in 2 Corinthians 6:17 fit in with the fact that there are no male and female distinctions in the Body of Christ? Well, the Church the Body of Christ, to which all believers belong, is all to do with the truth of our common salvation as Christians. A different biblical term is ‘the house of God.’ This is not just the same thing under a different name or figure. A Bible-wide view of the term would show that it has to do with our service for God, as expressing the Faith (or body of teaching) which was once delivered to the saints (Jude v3). In the New Testament we come to the inescapable conclusion that God’s house was made up of, or was the aggregate of, all the New Testament churches

of God, such as those that were to be found at Corinth, Ephesus etc., and to which Paul wrote letters.

When Paul wrote to the Church of God in Corinth, in particular, in 1 Corinthians 11:11 he spoke of the interdependence of men and women in divine service. Unlike in the Body of Christ, Paul was able to make a distinction between man and woman in the local church and in the house of God. He outlined their equal, yet different, roles in service: sisters being required to be in subjection, not to speak in church services and to have their heads covered. So, in the separate mention of sons and daughters, I see again that this aspect of adoption, even today, definitely has to do with a collective, unified testimony for God. As with me you consider Israel's adoption from the standpoint of Romans 9:4, I urge you to consider if this has a voice for you – are you sure you have a place within its corresponding counterpart today?

## CHAPTER TWO: THE GLORY

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**H**ow often have you sung of the glory of God? I wonder if what it means to you bears any resemblance to what it meant to those among God's people long ago? According to Romans 9:4-5, "the adoption" belonged to the Israelites, and what that involves we thought about in the last chapter, but we are also told that "the glory" belonged to the Israelites. I think it is significant that when God began to take up His ancient people, when He singled out and revealed Himself to Abraham, the first Hebrew, the first ever Jew, if you like, He revealed Himself as the "God of glory." It is Stephen when he is being martyred in Acts 7 who says: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia."

It was the God of glory who appeared later to Moses also, for we read that after Moses had finished speaking with God the skin of his face used to shine. And what is more, when God gave instructions for the building of the Tabernacle, that is the special tent in which He would live among His people, and which would be a sort of portable temple in which God was to be served and worshipped by His people as they travelled to the land He had promised them. When Moses set it all up with its curtains and coverings, this is what we read in Exodus 40: "And he [that is Moses] raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not

able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

This is what Jewish writers have called ‘the shekinah.’ The shekinah glory being a rabbinical phrase for the visible manifestation of God, the glory, which demonstrated when He was in residence in the tabernacle, or later, in the Temple. Just as it must have been awesome to see the glory of God come and fill His earthly house, it must, equally, have been tremendously sad to see it go away, and it did go away. God could, and can, only reside on earth among a people who are obedient to His Word, who maintain holiness while seeking His forgiveness. There came a day when a young woman in Israel in giving birth to a son called his name ‘Ichabod’ which means ‘the glory has departed from Israel’ (1 Samuel 4:21). What had happened to cause God’s glory to leave His house? What had happened was that His own people had plundered it to bring out from its innermost compartment the special symbol of God’s presence, the holy ark of the covenant. This they had proceeded to take to the battlefield in a misguided and disastrous attempt to achieve victory over their enemies. God had departed from them because they had departed from His Word.

But how reluctant God always was to leave His people, as we see through the words of the later prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel lived around 600 BC when other enemies of God’s people, were oppressing them and carrying them away captive. This time it was the Babylonians. God had promised that, for as long as His people obeyed Him, they would be invincible. Sadly, time and time again they turned their backs on Him, and suffered defeat and captivity as a consequence, as God used the surrounding nations

to humble and discipline them in order that He might ultimately bring them back to Himself as His people. Ezekiel was one of the early captives and he writes from captivity in Babylon the book in our Bibles that bears his name. Throughout the book of Ezekiel we are given glimpses of the glory of God. It is interesting to trace all the places where it appears.

He first saw the glory of the LORD in the land of the Babylonians by the River Chebar, then he saw it by the plain. By the time we come to chapter 8, Ezekiel's caught away in a vision back to the temple at Jerusalem and it is there he now sees God's glory. At first by the door of the inner court (Ezekiel 8:3) then pausing over the threshold of the temple (Ezekiel 10:4) then at the east gate (Ezekiel 10:18-19) then on the mountain on the east side of the city of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 11:23). So you see once again the glory of God was departing, this time from the magnificent temple that Solomon had built. All so tragically different from the day when Solomon had dedicated the temple with sacrifices and prayer in 2 Chronicles 6-7.

Then the glory of God had come and so filled the temple that the priests could not continue their service for a while. But as we consider again how the glory of God, as it were, paused at these various places that Ezekiel mentions: the inner court, the threshold, the outer eastern gate, the adjacent mountain, we are given the distinct impression that God is reluctant to leave His house, but He was forced to do so in this case. He departed because of the idolatrous practices that were being carried out even within the chambers of the house itself. As the glory departs, judgement is spoken. Surely, this was the glory Paul spoke of in Romans 9:4 as being among the great privileges of the people of

God. It is the glory of His presence among a worshipping, serving people, so long as they continue to obey His Word. What a privilege indeed: to have such a token of His presence on earth. So Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC.

Some seventy years later, a temple was rebuilt on the same site by a returning remnant of the Israelite people. They were a remnant because those who returned to build were very much fewer in number than those who had been taken away captive. It was a time of revival, which we read about in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. The two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, spoke their prophecies about this time too. The rebuilding went ahead at God's command and He honoured the house or temple that resulted. It was, in fact, to this basic temple, somewhat beautified by Herod, that the Lord Jesus came when He was on earth. But there is no mention of any visible, luminous manifestation of God's presence there, no shekinah glory. Although the visible glory never reappeared in an earthly temple, we come to the profounder words with which the apostle John opens his Gospel when he writes: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Not that this was a visible glory around the Lord when He was here on earth, artists sometimes fancifully depict the Lord Jesus as having some sort of halo or corona around His head.

There was nothing like that, but this glory refers to the moral excellency of the Lord. His words and actions and everything about Him, set Him apart from all others, pointing to His greatness and declaring His deity. Some forty times in John's Gospel

we read about glory in connection with the Lord Jesus. Just as everything in God's temple long before had said "glory"; so now everything we read about the Lord in this Gospel by John says "glory". I finally want to take you to the letter to the Hebrews, those very people to whom the God of glory had revealed Himself twenty-one centuries before. And I want to show you here this very point we have seen from John's Gospel: that the glory of God radiates, it streams forth, in the Person of His Son, even Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 is speaking of the Lord when it says: "who being the brightness of His glory." The older versions use the word "effulgence" but it simply means a "brightness from", as in the light streaming in rays from the sun.

"Brightness of the eternal glory

Shall His praise unuttered lie,

Who would hush the heaven-sent story

Of the One who came to die..."

But these opening verses of the letter to the Hebrews which are full of the glory of the Son, the Lord Jesus, are set there in a particular context, and will you note it is the context of God's earthly house. For let us follow down to chapter 3: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who [is] faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His [that is God's] house. For this One [that is Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honour than the house ... Moses indeed was faithful in all [God's] house as a servant ... but Christ as a

Son over [God's] house, whose house are we if we hold fast ..." In what we have just read the message is that the Lord Jesus is greater than Moses.

Remember this letter was originally written to Jewish Christians who had tremendous respect for Moses. Moses is identified here with God's building, the tabernacle house we were talking about earlier; but the Lord Jesus is identified with God, the builder or architect of everything, including the tabernacle. Moses is described as a servant in relation to that former house of God; whereas Jesus is described as "Son over", that is having absolute authority or Lordship over God's house on earth today. As a builder is greater than the building he builds, as a son is greater than a servant, so the glory of the Lord Jesus far outstrips the glory of Moses.

The glory of God was seen in Moses' face, but it was a reflected glory. However, when Paul wrote his second letter to the Church of God at Corinth, he wrote of believers, by the Spirit, seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To summarize, what are we saying? The glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. But He is Son over God's house, so we would expect the greatest demonstration of God's glory to be seen in His house. And in Hebrews that is where we find it.

He, the true shekinah glory, is over God's house today, as the glory was over God's house in Old Testament days. That is why Romans 9:4 cites the glory as Israel's great privilege, number 2 in the list of 8. They had the privilege of building and serving in His house. And what of today? God's house today is a spiritual house made up of living stones, disciples of the Lord Jesus who

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have come to Christ, the Living Stone, in obedience, and who have been built together in churches of God, which in fellowship together, make up God's house. It is a great subject. May I ask - have you seen this particular aspect of the glory of the Lord? Are you enjoying this greater privilege than Israel ever knew? What is your relationship as a living stone to the true shekinah glory of God's Son over God's house today?

## CHAPTER THREE: THE COVENANTS

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What is a covenant? The Bible mentions quite a few but which, if any, are of importance to Christians today? Paul's talking about his fellow countrymen, his compatriots, the Israelites in Romans 9:4-5, and he says this: "to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." In the previous two chapters we took a look at what 'the adoption' and 'the glory' meant for God's people, Israel, long ago. We have been able to see that there are biblical counterparts that God intends us to appreciate and experience today. Let us see if the same thing applies in connection with today's subject of 'the covenants'.

A covenant is an agreement between, say, two persons, and we often talk of them being the two parties between whom the covenant is made. In the Bible, covenants were always regarded as very serious affairs, a bit like a very solemn business agreement, a binding contract, or in some cases, like a treaty. A covenant was an undertaking entered into before God, and solemnly ratified with religious ritual. We read of Bible characters like Abraham (Genesis 21) and David (1 Samuel 18), making covenants with other individuals. What is of more relevance to us, of course, are those occasions when God made covenants with people. Some examples involving individuals are those with Noah (Genesis 6)

when guaranteeing not to flood the world again, or with Aaron (Numbers 18), when guaranteeing the priesthood to his family, and with David (2 Samuel 23), guaranteeing his descendants would be king after him.

But most important of all for our study are those covenants that God made with His people. Nowhere in the Bible is the actual procedure of making a covenant given in detail, but I think we can piece together some of the main features. It would have to begin, of course, with agreement on the terms, some sort of agreement that committed at least one of the parties to benefit and help the other in the future. As we said, it was a serious business, not something to be done lightly. An indication of this is given when the whole process is referred to by the shorthand description of an 'oath.' Luke 1:72-73 refer to God's 'holy covenant. the oath which He swore to our father Abraham.' It seems then that usually both parties swore an oath to the effect that they would carry out the obligations they were committing themselves to.

Normally, the Hebrews didn't talk about 'making a covenant' as we might say today, but they talked instead about 'cutting a covenant.' Very likely, it is the religious ritual of sacrifice that lies behind this phrase. If Genesis chapter 15, where God covenanted with Abraham, is typical then what happened was that the sacrificial animal was cut in two and laid on the ground so that the parties to the covenant could walk between the parts. The same kind of feature is referred to in Jeremiah 34:18, and since something like one and half thousand years separate these examples, we can probably conclude this was a fairly persistent feature. Probably, what was happening was the parties involved were say-

ing, in effect, let me be like this animal, that is: cut in pieces, if I fail to keep the obligations I am promising to abide by today.

There was often a witness too, but not a witness such as we would have in a court of law, say. Rather than someone who could stand up and testify, some biblical covenants had even inanimate objects as their witnesses. Jacob and Laban (in Genesis 31), made use of a pile of stones and Abraham and Ahimelech (Genesis 21) had seven ewe lambs. The witness was simply something that served as a reminder of what the participants had done. Perhaps, the most famous witness or token of any covenant ever is the rainbow. God looks at the rainbow and remembers His promise, His covenant, never to flood the whole earth again in order to destroy it. Possibly it was usual practice to hold a feast at the end of the procedure, as Jacob did in Genesis 31 or to exchange gifts as David and Jonathan did in 1 Samuel 18 after the defeat of Goliath; there may even have been other features, but these seem to be the main ones.

But which covenants are being referred to in Romans 9? As well as the adoption and the glory belonging to Israel, it is also said that the covenants belonged to them too. Which covenants are these? I would judge that, principally, what is being referred to there is the covenant God made with Abraham, and the covenant God later made with His liberated people at Mount Sinai. Let's take them in historical order. God's covenant with Abraham is a very important one. It is all the more important when we consider that the New Testament still views it as being valid, as still being of continuing effect. You see, the coming of Christ is described in the opening chapter of Luke's Gospel as being the out-working of that covenant God made with Abraham.

And what is more, in the New Testament, we as believers are called 'sons of Abraham' because of our faith. Spiritually speaking, we are descended from Abraham (see Galatians 3:9). When Paul in Romans chapter 4, and again in Galatians chapter 3, wants to stress the fact that we are made right with God only on the basis of faith alone, he goes right back to the case of Abraham. Paul's message in Galatians 3 to early Jewish Christians who were wavering in their faith under persecution, and who were tempted to return to Judaism, Paul's message to them was that the Gospel blessing, promise and inheritance stem not from the Law to which they wished to return, but that they all stemmed from something that predated it, from God's covenant with Abraham in fact. So, the covenant that underpins our salvation as individual believers today is still the covenant God made with Abraham nearly four thousand years ago, for through it has come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus.

Perhaps the most important covenant of all those found in the first part of the Bible is the one which God made with the whole nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. It is described in the book of Exodus, in chapter 24, just after the Israelites have been redeemed from slavery in the land of Egypt and brought through a baptismal-type experience in the waters of the Red Sea. It all began when Moses told the people all the LORD's words and laws, to which they responded in unison that they would do everything the LORD had said. Early the next morning, Moses built an altar and young Israelites offered sacrifices. What happened with the blood of these offerings is especially noteworthy: Moses dashed half of it against the altar. Then Moses read the 'Book of the Covenant;' and when the people replied: 'We will obey.' we

will do everything the LORD has commanded,' then Moses took the other half of the blood and threw it over the people. The Hebrews letter (9:19) also tells us that some of this blood was also put on the Book of the Covenant as well as on the people.

All these actions were of extreme importance: the people were now the people of God. They were in a covenant relationship with the one true God to whom they had pledged their total obedience. They were also committed as the people of the Book. On the other side of it, God was now graciously committed in a special way to this one nation, this one people. They had become His by covenant. Really, this is the foundation for nearly everything else that happens in the Old Testament.

It was to this event and covenant the Lord Jesus looked back in the upper room. You remember how after keeping the Passover with His disciples just hours before He died, the Lord took bread and said "This is My body", and then He took a cup of wine and said "This is My blood of the new covenant" (Mark 14:24). A new covenant had been promised in the writings of Jeremiah the prophet; now it was becoming reality, its sacrificial basis being the work of Christ on the cross. Hebrews chapter 8 presents the Lord Jesus as the Mediator of' this "better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:8). And chapter 9 goes on to expand on the greater privileges in service that this new covenant brings for the people of God today. Remember, this letter was written to early Hebrew disciples in New Testament churches of God. Like their Old Testament counterparts they, too, had known redemption, in their case from Satan's spiritual slavery, and next they had been baptized, or literally dipped, in a way that corresponded to Israel's Red Sea crossing where, ac-

ording to 1 Corinthians 10:2, the water had been on either side and above them. And, finally, they were continuing to obey all the Lord Jesus had spoken through His apostles.

It is in the united church fellowship of these early churches of God that we find the full New Testament answer to the people who had stood before Mt. Sinai. Like the Old Covenant, the New Covenant was made between God and those who were specially His people, although all believers, whether gathered among His people or not, were to be beneficiaries under its terms. Before we leave the subject, it is interesting to notice that the biblical language of the New Testament passed over the obvious word for a covenant and used another word, properly meaning a will, when the meaning of 'covenant' is definitely intended. Perhaps the ordinary or common word for covenant in New Testament times gave too much the impression of two-sidedness, whereas God's covenants are not things which He negotiates with us.

In God's covenants, He dictates the terms, like a will which gives the authoritative directions of a deceased person. What this means is that it is still our role to obey everything that the Lord has commanded us in His Word. Then, and only then, can we scripturally claim all that belongs to the covenant privilege for God's people. It is in the New Covenant that we find the full answer to Israel's covenant privilege listed in Romans 9:4.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE LAW

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Perhaps ‘adoption’, ‘glory’ and ‘covenants’ are more likely sounding as privileges than ‘the Law’. The Law has almost a foreboding ring to it. We may feel it is necessary and beneficial, but, generally speaking, it is not something we would get enthusiastic about! But we are going through the eight privileges of God’s people, that is the Israelites, and the privileges are as Paul lists them in Romans 9:4-5. After mention of their adoption, their experience of seeing His visible glory, and their being the beneficiaries of His covenants of grace with them, Paul certainly does include ‘the Law’ as one of their privileges. Let us try to see it then from what would have been their perspective.

In Romans chapter 3, Paul opens by asking what advantage there had been in being a Jew, one of God’s ancient chosen people. And he himself answers the question by saying that the Jews had been entrusted with the very words, or sayings, of God. That puts a different complexion on the Law, doesn’t it? Nearly forty years after the Law was first given, Moses reminded the Israelites of “the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire” (Deuteronomy 4:10-11). This was the way God had given the ten commandments - He had literally thundered them from the midst of all that fiery spectacle. It must have been awesome!

No wonder Moses asked them later, still in Deuteronomy 4, but now verse 33: “Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?’ A chapter later in verse 26 he repeats the point: “For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?” There can be no doubt that the fact this Law was spoken to them directly by the voice of God made it a thrilling and unique thing for them. This is where we find a very real sense of privilege being expressed, for in the same passage of Scripture, Moses tells the people to be careful to keep these statutes and judgements “for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgements as are in all this law ...?’”

The Law as it extended to cover their family and business lives; their agriculture and hygiene; their morals and spirituality was a treasury of divine wisdom, the likes of which no other nation ever had. But one of the main purposes of the Law was to be a measure of sin. “It was added because of transgressions,” Paul says in Galatians 3. And in Romans 7 he emphasizes that “the law [itself] is ... holy and just and good.” But it was precisely this good Law which showed Paul that sin must really be very bad if it produced death in him through that same good Law (see Romans 7:13). In this way it was designed to prepare them for the com-

ing of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus, who would deal at last with the fundamental problem of sin.

By the works of the Law no-one could be made right in God's sight; the Law revealed the scale of the problem, a problem which could only be resolved as a result of faith in Christ. Christ, when He came, said that He had not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it. He taught, and demonstrated in His life, that the whole content of the Law could be summed up in two commandments: the first, and greatest, being to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; and the second being to love our neighbour as yourself. This was how Paul later could say that love, in a word, is the fulfilment of the Law.

In Romans 8:4, we learn that if, as Christians, we live Spirit-filled lives, we will find the power to fulfil the Law's requirements and to satisfy its demands. You see, the spirit and intent of the Law is incorporated within God's will and teaching for believers today, but it is ceremonies and rituals are certainly a thing of the past. The Law's regulations about food and observing special days etc. were only a shadow, a shadow of which Christ is the substance. This is what Paul says in Colossians, in the same section where he speaks of Christ wiping "out the handwriting of requirements (or bill of debts) that was against us, which was contrary to us ...", you remember he says, "[Christ] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). This is speaking of our indebtedness as measured or gauged by the Law.

Christ took that bill of debt and nailed it to His cross just as debtors' bills used to be nailed to their doors once they had been paid. It was a way of showing everyone that they had been dis-

charged from their debt. So, just as Deuteronomy 5:22 tells us that at the time of the giving of the Law, the LORD spoke the words of the Law “in the mountain ... with a loud voice; and He added no more”; even so when the Law was taken away, at least in its externals, at the cross, it was again a case of the Lord speaking on that other Mount with a loud voice, and again He added no more when He cried out: “It is finished.” That is the last word on our indebtedness if we are a believer on the Lord Jesus.

In the early churches of God, about which we read in the New Testament, for that was what the local gatherings of disciples of the Lord Jesus in each locality were called, in the early churches there was a debate once about whether the Law needed to be kept as before. The matter was decisively settled once for all in Acts 15 with decrees sent to all the churches to the effect that “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit ... to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. Decrees like these formed part of what the New Testament calls the Faith, in this sense meaning a body of teaching. It is elsewhere called “the apostles’ teaching”, they having received it from the Lord Jesus to deliver it to His disciples. And through their writings in the New Testament of our Bibles, it comes down to us in our day and is certainly binding upon us just as the Law was for the Jew in the past.

This is where we can see the present-day answer to the Law of Moses; it is found in the teaching of the apostles, and like the Jews we should regard it a great privilege to keep this. These days Bible teaching is not as popular as it once was. In some circles, church services might make little or no use of the Scriptures. Per-

haps some think it is outdated or has been superseded, or that it is dry and boring or that it simply creates confusion and division because Christians often cannot agree about it and end up picking and choosing which teachings of the New Testament they want to keep. Instead of this sort of attitude we should have much more of the attitude of the Jews long ago who considered it a great privilege to be entrusted with the words of God. We need to recapture something of the great sense of awe that was theirs when the Law was first introduced at Mt. Sinai.

That was after the Israelites had been liberated or redeemed from slavery in Egypt by the killing of the Passover Lamb. Then, they had fled out into the desert but soon found themselves in a huge cul-de-sac hemmed in by the Red Sea. But all this was in the will of God, who opened up the sea for them ahead of Pharaoh's pursuing army. In 1 Corinthians 6:10, Paul uses an interesting word to describe their experience, he says they were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Walls of water on their right hand and on the left and a watery cloud above gives the perfect illustration of being buried in water.

With Pharaoh's army drowned behind them in their vain attempt to follow them across, the Israelites then moved on to the scene at Mt. Sinai, which we were recalling earlier: that was the time when to this redeemed, baptized people, God gave His word, His teaching, which they promised to obey. Only when they did so, and not before, did they become God's people. And the Law that He gave them at that time was to remain in force right through the centuries for it's still there in Malachi and, of course, as we have said, was kept by the Lord Jesus Himself.

It should not be amazing to consider that God is perfectly consistent in all His ways. And indeed when we come to New Testament history, we find exactly the same steps in the formation of God's New Testament people. They were first of all those who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God: Jesus Himself, their redemption in Him was through their faith in His crosswork for them. Disciples were then, as followers of Christ, baptised in water to acknowledge their new Leader even as Israelites had acknowledged Moses in their baptism. And then what? Well, let us actually read from Acts 2:41 of the original practice of Christianity: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized."

That is a summary of the two steps we have talked about already, but next we find they were added to the local church of God in Jerusalem that had newly come into existence that day with the coming of the Holy Spirit; this is what we actually read: "they were added to them." And they continued steadfastly in the apostles teaching' v.42. Here it is again, like as in the Old Testament: after redemption and baptism, God gave them His Word, His teaching, this time by means of the apostles rather than by means of Moses. By obedience to this New Testament teaching, Christians throughout the early churches of God were united together as God's people. As Israel kept the Law, so they kept the Faith. And it is not as if this just describes what happened for our interest, this was definitely what the Lord intended. You see, the same three features are clearly there when He addressed His disciples in resurrection on the Galilean mountain. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus speaks the words: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded.”

Did you notice the same three steps or principles again? Have you received His word and become a disciple? Have you been baptized in the name of the triune God? Are you and your church, by His help, obeying ‘all things’ taught by the Lord in the New Testament? Remember, it is one of the privileges of God’s people to have such a ‘Law’ as we find in the New Testament teaching of our Lord through His apostles. That body of teaching, the Faith, is our wisdom.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE SERVICE OF GOD

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If I were to ask you what you immediately think of when the word 'service' is mentioned, I wonder what you would say. Perhaps, it would be central heating boilers, or cars or restaurants! But they would not have anything to do with the 'service' that is mentioned in Romans 9:4-5 which we are looking at in this book. The apostle Paul was writing there about his fellow-countrymen, the Israelites, 'to whom,' he said, 'pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.' So what did Paul have in mind when somewhere near the middle of that list of privileges he spoke of 'the service of God' as belonging to Israel?

The word 'service' here has to do with worship. I should say straight away that it does not just have to do with worship: it is, in fact, the highest form of worship made known to us in our Bibles. First, we will take a check on what worship is. Remember Revelation 4 and 5? We are given a picture there of the heavenly scene surrounding the throne with all the hosts of heaven ascribing worth to God and the Lamb. That is a window opened to us on the substance of Christian worship in this world and the next. Worship is a recognition of the worthiness of God. But a recognition of the worthiness of God can be expressed in different ways: for example, it might be shown by our bodily pos-

ture, or by our mental attitude or by the offering of our actions to God. It is the last of these, the offering of certain actions to God, that some versions of the Bible at least describe by the word 'service', as in 'the service of God' we are looking at in Romans 9:4.

Examples of each of these are to be found in this same letter. We can begin with Romans 14.11, which says: "To me every knee shall bow." One day, before the judgement-seat of Christ we will fulfil our part in this universal prophecy. Our bodily posture will then express our worship, our recognition of His all-worthiness. It is at the judgement-seat of Christ that all believers will appear. Future judgement for believers is quite different from future judgement for non-believers. Whereas non-believers will be judged for their sins, according to their works; those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour will never be condemned since the Lord Jesus has taken their blame and punishment on the cross; they will, however, face an assessment of their lives as disciples. When this takes place, before Christ, we will worship, because we will express our recognition of His worthiness by bowing before Him.

Staying with the idea of bowing down, we note that the most popular Old Testament word for worship is first used in Genesis 8:2 when it says that Abraham "bowed himself down" before the Lord and the two angels. And most popular in the New Testament is the word for worship that was originally descriptive of someone bowing and taking the hand extended towards them and kissing it, thus rendering obeisance. In this sense the Lord Jesus is very often spoken of as receiving worship, for example from the wise men, the leper, Jairus and the disciples in the boat on

Galilee. So much for that first way of expressing worship, by our bodily posture.

At the same time, our attitude is very important. We can go right back to Romans 1:25 for another example of worship, albeit a negative one, which says: "They ... worshipped ... the creature." What it does show, nevertheless, is that beyond bodily posture, worship, rightly expressed, is an attitude of mind. This particular word, which is word number two in our study, came to be enshrined in the title of Caesar as 'Augustus,' an august person, one demanding reverence and veneration. In this sense we have the example of Lydia as one that worshipped or revered God. We must never lose that sense of reverential awe in the presence of God. But here we come to the thrust of today's word from our text for this series in Romans 9. For we can worship God by what we do, providing we do it as an acknowledgement of His worthiness, offering our actions as service to Him as issuing from the kind of attitude we have been considering.

This brings us to our final example of worship which is the one taken from our text for this book: "My countrymen ... to whom pertain the service of God." Of course, the reference is to Old Testament Israel, but the same word translated as 'service' is used of the New Testament people worshipping as disciples throughout the churches of God. For example, when Paul writing to the Christians in the Church of God in Philippi said "We ... worship God in the Spirit" (Philippians 3:3). That is the same root word as is translated 'service'. It does not always have to be, but this key word for worship, this word 'service', in Romans 9 is being used of collective worship; that is why we are right to include it as one of the great privileges of God's people in any age. What is

more, the collective worship of the people of God as expressed in this distinctive word is only ever biblically directed to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus in the sense of “Him only shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:8).

This does not detract, of course, from the deity of the Lord Jesus nor from the fact that He is a rightful recipient of worship as we saw earlier, but it does mean that collective worship is always expressed to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus. The service of God in this sense in Israel, their collective worship, was best expressed in the annual “Feasts of Yahweh” which were identified with what was called in Deuteronomy 12:5 as ‘the Place of the Name’, in other words with tabernacle or temple service. There were seven of these feasts, ranging throughout the farming year and tied in to the three annual harvests. There were meals and times of eating involved or associated with them, but careful study shows these feasts were basically occasions when the people of God came together; they were, actually, arranged meetings in which they came before God by His appointment, for that is the meaning of the word ‘feast’.

The most remarkable feature of them, running like a thread down through them, was the command to remember. Without doubt, they find their counterpart today in what we call ‘the Remembrance’, or the Lord’s supper as the Bible calls it, when together, in church, we obey the Lord Jesus by remembering Him as He has asked us to. So we, too, have appointments to keep with God, just like Israel, but no longer three times per year, but once a week! In the Old Testament, the people of God came together at the set feasts for collective worship. Now in their New Testament counterpart, churches of God are spoken of as ‘com-

ing together' at the 'Lord's Supper'. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:18, we read: "When you come together as a church".

This coming together by the people of God was clearly for worship, and the Hebrews' letter talks of the worshipping people of God entering the heavenly sanctuary in which the Lord Jesus ministers as great High Priest over God's house. What we are saying is this, and I invite you to check it with your Bible, that there is a type of worship that is collective and which may only be offered to 'the Father', that is, neither to the Lord Jesus nor to 'our Father'. God wants this worship from His people.

I recommend a study of worship as a sure way of confirming that there is such a thing as a worshipping New Testament people of God expressed throughout the Churches of God, the exact counterpoint of Israel and what they did in Old Testament times. What I am referring to is this distinctive word used to describe the collective worship that turns up in our text for this book, distinctive in that it is the highest expression of worship. In any biblical form of worship which we have been discussing, the worship is to be Spirit-led, Christ-centred and Scripture-based. John 4:24 records the Lord Jesus as saying that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." So true worship is based on knowing the truth (see Acts 17:23).

This truth is revealed through the Word of God which must never be devalued or relegated, but rather expressed through our carefully prepared and offered spiritual meditations; and all in a way that is clearly Spirit-led. How easy it is to confuse this with the force of human personality! Even an emotional atmosphere

can be contrived, whereas worship needs to be genuinely Spirit-led. So, we can worship God at all times, as individuals, and in various different ways. However, our Romans 9 text has brought us to the conclusion that there are also special times, and a prescribed worship of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, that is collectively done by the Churches of God.

Without doubt, the Remembrance (also known as the Breaking of Bread) is the highest expression of this highest form of worship. This privilege that we can enjoy today answers to Israel's enjoyment of the service of God in days gone by.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE PROMISES

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Listed in Romans 9:4 among the privileges belonging to God's people, and after 'the service of God' which we looked at in the previous chapter, we find the words 'and the promises.' But we might ask: 'Which promises?' Galatians 3:16 gives us a little more information as to what these promises were. It says that "to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made" and it makes clear that the seed referred to is Christ. When God first called Abraham to leave his native land, He promised him the blessing of a land as well as the blessing of nationhood, saying, "Get out from your country ... to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Once he was in the land, there came the day when God told childless Abraham to count the stars. Even though Abraham was childless, he believed God when He said his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Gen 15:6 says that "he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." The fact that the Bible tells us this is all very instructive for us today, for when God spoke to Abraham of worldwide blessing, He was anticipating the Christian gospel; and when Abraham simply believed in God, he was demonstrating the only type of response that ever makes anyone right with God.

Right from the beginning, God had promised Abraham a land - the promised land. The promise is repeated later in chapter 17:8,

when God says to Abraham: "I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan." And did you notice that the promise again mentions a seed, or descendants? The immediate fulfilment of this promise was Isaac, but the ultimate fulfilment was in Christ as the opening of Matthew's Gospel shows when it opens with the words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ ... the Son of Abraham." When, at Mount Moriah, Abraham's faith was tested and he would have offered up Isaac, the Gospel picture is obviously of the Father giving His one and only Son. There the promise is again repeated: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). This was a direct reference to Christ as Abraham's seed as confirmed by Galatians 3.

So, all in all, we have a promised seed and a promised land. I suggest these are the promises referred to in the list of Israelite privileges in Romans 9. And now, if we turn to the letter to the Hebrews, we can see how this is still relevant for those who are God's people today. The first two chapters of Hebrews have been compared to the two great pillars which stood at the entrance to Solomon's Temple. These two introductory chapters are definitely structural, for everything else that follows in the letter is built on the twin truths of the Lord's deity and humanity which are presented use first two chapters. Then chapter 3 introduces us to the subject of God's house both in its past aspect with Moses, and in its present aspect with Christ.

What is God's house, you ask? It is shown here to be the place of the 3 'r's: reside, rule and rest. What does anyone do in their house? They reside there. So does God in His house. Those Christians who hold fast to the Bible's teaching form God's

house: a habitation for God in the Spirit, as Paul puts it writing at the end of Ephesians chapter 2. God's house is also where He rules. This is why it's those who hold fast to their obedience to God's Word that are addressed in Hebrews 3:6, which says: "but Christ as a Son over His house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end". Did you notice the words: "if we hold fast"? God can't reside where His rules are not respected, as we saw earlier in this book. And, lastly, just as we expect to be able to rest whenever we are at home, "home, sweet, home," as we say, God's house, too, is the place where He rests.

The rest that is mentioned at this point in the letter to the Hebrews is a different word from that we find in Matthew's Gospel when the Lord Jesus said "Come to me and I will give you rest." The 'rest' that Hebrews teaches us about is literally a resting, or settling, down: in other words, a dwelling place. It is a settled rest in a set place, and that is the place where God dwells. He invites His people to settle down where lie Himself has settled down, and so share His rest. The remainder of Hebrews chapter 3 and virtually all of chapter 4 then go on to develop further the idea of God's people sharing God's rest. This is against the background of Israel's attempts to enter the promised land and fully experience its rest. Time and again with Moses, Joshua and David there had been specific opportunities for Israel to fully realize God's intention for them: which was rest in the promised land. The historical hindrances that prevented them are spelled out: the people had been hardened by sin so that they did not enter into God's rest in the land because of unbelief. Again it says they came short and did not enter because of disobedience. The

Spirit of God pleads with believers today just as the same message was brought to the people in David's time: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

You see, the thrilling thing is that the door of opportunity has not closed yet! "Since a promise remains of entering His rest," Hebrews 4:1 says. How can we avoid hardness, unbelief and disobedience, so as to take possession of this promise for ourselves? Well, in the same section in Hebrews chapters 4 and 5, God tells us about the resources of the Word, Throne and Priest. Verse 12 says: "The word of God is living and powerful". Verse 14 says: "We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" and verse 16 invites us to "Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." That is what I was referring to as the three resources of the Word, the Priest and the Throne.

It strikes me that they are presented at this point in Hebrews where it is dealing with Israel's failures to enter God's rest, so that we may laid hold of them and do better than Israel. That will only be by reading the Word, praying at the Throne and relying on the priestly help of the Lord. So the idea of rest now corresponds to the promise of the land to Israel, it was God's intention that they were to enjoy rest in the promised land, which was to be a land of rest ... Regarding the second matter of the promised Seed, we come to this in Hebrews 6 which again refers back to God's dealings with Abraham. In verse 13 we read: "God made a promise to Abraham ... saying 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.'" In patience, Abraham obtained the promise through Isaac.

But we are referred to as the 'heirs' of this promise, too, in so far as it is fully and finally to do with Isaac's descendent - in other words: Christ. We are urged to "lay hold of the hope set before us." This hope is not the hope of Christ's return for us in the future, but the hope of our drawing near and entering God's presence now through Jesus Christ in His office as High Priest. It is so important to distinguish between these two hopes. The main content of Hebrews has to do with us realising the hope of the promised Seed: that is, Christ as High Priest. It is the only letter in our Bibles that speaks about Christ as High Priest, and it is quite taken up with this high priestly hope, as we might term it, the fact that in Him we have access now into God's presence; not only as individuals, but even more importantly as part of the company of God's worshipping and praying people.

As we come back in closing to our starting point in Romans 9, with its mention of 'the promises' as one of the great privileges of God's former people Israel, I hope you can see with me that, for those who were with Paul in churches of God in New Testament times, and stretching on through until today, there is still a relevance in these collective promises. There remains a promise of entering God's rest, although it is no longer associated with a geographical area; and secondly, in moving from the promise of Hebrews 4:1 to the promise of Hebrews 6:13, we find it bound up with the hope of our entering God's presence. There, a better hope is described through which we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:19). This depends on our laying hold of Christ as He now serves in His office as High Priest.

At this point the chapter clearly makes the link with Christ as the promised seed of Abraham: the One in whom we would be

blessed, not only the blessing of salvation but the full extent of blessing available through His ministry as High Priest in heaven today. So there we have it - promised rest in God's house and the promised Seed as its Priest - let us search the Scriptures and let God search our hearts to check we are not coming short of the one nor failing to lay hold on the other.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FATHERS

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Let us again remind ourselves of our text in this book: Romans 9:4, in which Paul says, speaking of the Israelites: “to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises.” All these are privileges which we have considered together in previous chapters, relating them to believers today. Now we come to verse 5 which continues, still dealing with the Jewish people: “of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

We want in this chapter to think about ‘the fathers’. Who was Paul referring to? Well, we know he has already used the term in the opening verse of chapter 4. It is there he asks the question: “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found ...?” Clearly Abraham belongs to this category of persons known as ‘the fathers’. And, of course, what he had found or what we find from him is the great gospel truth of being made right with God only on the ground of faith alone. Then again later in chapter 9, from which our text comes, we come down to verse 10 where Paul writes about ‘our father Isaac’. It is quite clear then, isn't it, that Paul has in mind the founders of the Jewish race when he uses this term ‘fathers’?

Of course, from Paul's day down to the present, Israel, nationally, has been hostile to the Christian message or Gospel. This led

Paul to say of them in Romans chapter 11:28: “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” “Beloved for the sake of the fathers.” I wonder what Paul meant by that? We can trace it all the way back to Deuteronomy 7:6, where we read concerning the Israelites: “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. 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; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers ...”

God's favour shown to Israel, especially in delivering them out of the land of Egypt, was not because of anything good God had seen in them, but it was purely based on His own sovereign love, first seen in His selection of the founders of the race - the fathers. So Israel was beloved for the sake of the fathers, and still is, although hostile to the Gospel.

As we look at the way Paul mentions ‘the fathers’ in Romans, we cannot escape this issue of God's sovereignty. Back once more in chapter 9, he writes about Jacob and Esau, the children of Isaac, whom Paul refers to as ‘our father Isaac’. He gives this commentary: “(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her [Rebecca] “The older shall serve the younger” (v.11).

What this verse makes very clear is that God's decree that Esau would serve Jacob, his younger brother, was not based on the respective merits of these children, for it was made known to Rebecca before the children were even born. We might be tempted to think: 'Ah, yes, but doesn't God know the end of a thing from the beginning?' In other words, He can give a verdict in advance based on the evidence of the life that is going to follow, can't He? But even Jacob's faith, as foreknown by God, is disqualified here by the explanation that is given for the decree. And what is it? We are back to God's sovereign electing love again. The recorded reason is: "Jacob, I have loved." God's sovereign choice finds its sufficient answer in His sovereign love, a love that is not performance-based, but unconditional.

If we were to say anything less than this, perhaps by understanding God's election or choice as resulting from Him already knowing in advance that they or we were going to believe in the end, then it would not explain Paul's strong and detailed defence of the fairness and righteousness of God that follows on directly from this in Romans 9. He anticipates the objections: "is there unrighteousness with God?" and "Why does He [God] still find fault?" If Paul was saying that God's selection was based on anticipated faith on the part of the individual, then these objections would not even arise. But when we understand Paul to say that those selected by God are called according to His purpose, then we expect the challenge: 'why does God hold it against those who are not in this category?'

But Paul says that is like the clay speaking back to the potter and trying to suggest to him what he should have done! It is better to recognize when we are out of our depth and simply rest on

God's Word, knowing with Abraham, that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right.

When we responded by God's grace to the Gospel message and received Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, we were responding in accordance with the 'whoever believes' invitation contained in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Later, as a more mature believer perhaps, we read the momentous words with which Paul opens his letter to the Church of God in Ephesus: "He [God] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundations of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). These two scriptural facts have been helpfully illustrated using the idea of a door. When we believed at salvation, it was as though we approached and passed through a door which bore on the lintel the inscription 'whoever believes'. Later, and now as a believer on the Lord Jesus, we look back and see that on the lintel on the other side of the door, the one now facing us, there was a different inscription. It bore the words "chosen in Christ."

The tenor of Paul's reasoning in the ninth chapter of Romans as it touches this deep subject of God's sovereignty, effectively seems to be saying: "You're wondering about the fairness of why some are saved and others are not; the real wonder is not that some are saved and others aren't, but the real wonder is that any are saved at all!" The whole human race was on the scrap-heap, fit only for destruction, and deservedly so, with no cause for complaint, even if God should mercifully save some, and do for them what they do not deserve. But there is another aspect to this election, one that is taken up by the apostle Peter and touches on our collective service for God, which brings us back really to the

thought of God's people and their privileges - which is our subject based on Romans 9:4-5.

Peter opens his first letter by addressing "the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia, elect ... for obedience." In other words, he was writing at that time to Christians who were scattered throughout five Roman Provinces. Further down the chapter, in v.23, he describes them as "born again" so, of course, they are "elect", but Peter does not just call them elect he says they were "elect ... for obedience." How had these believers shown their obedience? Well, these were Christians who had known baptism as chapter 3:21 makes clear, where Peter describes it an anti-type of Noah's Flood. That was one step in which they had demonstrated their obedience, for baptism is a definite command of the Lord Jesus for every disciple.

But what becomes equally clear as we read on in this letter, is that Peter's readers then were not just a number of individuals who had casual fellowship with each other, because Peter opens the fifth chapter in his first book by writing to the church elders who were among them. In fact, a study of the words reveals a fellowship of elders throughout a fellowship of churches. This ensured such a unity between them all that Peter is able, by the Spirit of God, to take up a whole series of collective nouns to describe them in chapter 2, and he begins by calling them a "chosen generation" or "elect race" as well as using such terms as a "holy nation" and a "special people". While every believer was elect or chosen, it seems it was their obedience to scriptural commands that entitled them to be recognized as God's together people. They had been "elect ... for obedience." At this point they were demon-

strating obedience, but the next time he writes, in his second letter, Peter feels the need to urge them in 2 Peter 1:10 to “make [their] call and election sure.”

I used to wonder why they had to make their election sure, given that we have heard Paul, in Romans, saying that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” So could Peter's audience really lose their election? No, but they could come short in arriving at obedience; they could come short of participating in the great privileges of being among God's people. If the mention of ‘the fathers’ in Romans 9 connects, as suggested, with the matter of election, then it is through Peter's letters that we find how this relates to our collective service for God today.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CHRIST

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**H**aving now dealt with Israel's privileges in terms of their adoption, the glory, covenants, law, their worship-service, the Messianic promises and the sovereign calling of their fathers, we come now to the last and greatest of all their privileges: the fact that it was from Israel that the Christ came. The original expression here is: "out from whom as a source, [that is from Israel], the Christ came according to the flesh, [that is a reference to His humanity], the One who is above all things, God eulogized forever."

This is a clear statement of the deity of Christ following mention of His humanity. I know some have read this differently: taking the words 'the eternally blessed God' as being a concluding doxology rather than continuing on as a further description of the Lord Jesus Christ. But to take it as a doxology makes for a very awkward reading of the ending of the verse, I suggest. And in the original New Testament language, the actual word order is 'God blessed' and that would be quite exceptional if this were meant as an ascription of praise to God the Father here. The construction points to Christ throughout the closing words. So we have four statements concerning the Lord Jesus Himself. First, that as to His human nature, He was a Jew. Second: He is the One who is over or above all. Third: He is the One who is God. And fourthly: He is the One who is well-spoken of or praised for ever. Our English word 'eulogize' is the direct equivalent of the word for 'blessed' here. It is good to conclude with a very special emphasis

like this on the clear biblical fact that the One who was known as Jesus of Nazareth is Himself God: God the Son.

These days, as there always have been, there are those who would detract from the deity of Jesus Christ, by saying that He, too, was a created being, albeit the first, the very first angel, and that even now He does not share full honours with God the Father. These views are absolutely wrong. As well as declaring Christ to be God, the conclusion of Romans 9:5 tells us He is 'over' - the Lord Jesus is the One who is above or over all things. Ephesians 1:20-21 tells us that in resurrection God seated the Lord Jesus Christ far above all principality and power and might and dominion. That is, He is the supreme Ruler, having been given all authority in heaven and earth. He is far above the realm of angelic beings, for they, too, are merely creatures like us, while He is the Creator Himself. Then verse 22 of Ephesians follows on to tell us that God has given "Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body."

This verse, too, declares the Lord Jesus to be head over all and specifically He is head over the body, that is the Church the Body, mentioned at the end of this verse. Everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus as Saviour since the first Pentecost gospel preaching in Acts 2 is included as a member of that Church described in our Bible as being Christ's Body. Our justification for saying this is 1 Corinthians 12:12,13, which says: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by [a better translation is 'in,' for the Lord Jesus is the Baptizer, for in...] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and all have been made to

drink into one Spirit.” This emphasizes that all believers undergo baptism in the Holy Spirit and that this is the means whereby they become incorporated as members of Christ's Body and Church. Peter's words in Acts 11:16,17 are also helpful when he explained about the first Gentile converts: “Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” So baptism in the Holy Spirit is shown by this to happen when a person believes on the Lord Jesus, that is, at the time of their salvation.

Now, as far as authority in the Church the Body is concerned, this is invested solely in the Head who is Christ. However, in the will of God this great spiritual union of all believers should find expression from New Testament times onwards in a visible unity of called-out and gathered-together disciples in every place: those who own Christ's lordship by their obedience to scriptural teaching. Thus we find mention of churches of God at Corinth, Ephesus etc. and these are presented as being altogether in ‘the fellowship’, that is the fellowship of all such churches as maintained in practice by the recognition of local elders or overseers. But the authority of these elders over the churches is as under the supreme authority of the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus who is described as Son over God's house. So as well as being over the spiritual union of the Church the Body, the Lord Jesus is over the united testimony of churches that form God's house today. In fact, Hebrews tells us He is not only Son over God's house (Hebrews 3:6), but He is High Priest over the house of God (He-

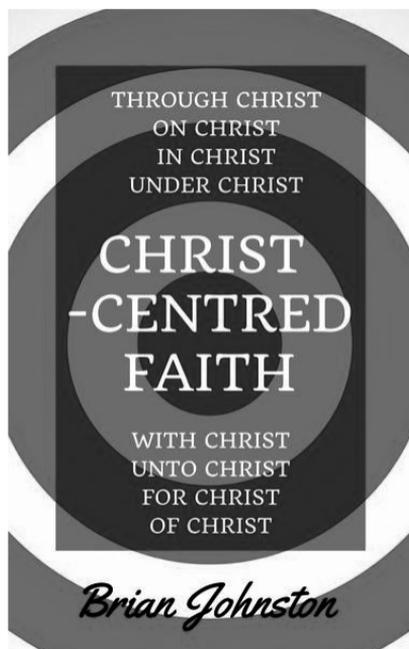
brews 10:21), which brings us to our final thought of worship, or specifically of speaking well of Christ.

In concluding this book on the privileges Israel once knew, we would say that the greatest privilege of all that can be shared by believers today is knowing and serving the Lord Jesus Christ by acknowledging Him as being 'over' God's house. One practical result of this is being able to gather week by week around the Lord's table to eat the Lord's Supper, which is how 1 Corinthians 11:20 describes the 'breaking of bread' of Acts 2:42. This is the time each week when we have the God-given opportunity for 'speaking well' of Him as a people. The psalmist expressed it perfectly at the beginning of Psalm 45, when he said: "My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer."

It is good when each Sunday morning our own hearts overflow in worship as we present to God our prepared, perhaps even rehearsed, appreciation of His Son, the Lord Jesus. There is no time to compare with that, when, as 1 Corinthians 14 puts it, "the whole church comes together in one place" (v.23) and each one 'has a psalm' (v.26) or Scripture-based meditation to offer, one that centres on Christ, His Person and His work. Surely God's heart is thrilled to hear His Son so well spoken of by His people! And God's Word declares He is worthy, for Romans 9:5 closes, you remember, by saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who is well-spoken of or praised for ever. And when we remember Him in the breaking of the bread, we are playing our part in that eternal song!



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## **About the Author**

Born and educated in Scotland, Brian worked as a government scientist until God called him into full-time Christian ministry on behalf of the Churches of God ([www.churchesofgod.info](http://www.churchesofgod.info)). His voice has been heard on Search For Truth radio broadcasts for over 30 years (visit [www.searchfortruth.podbean.com](http://www.searchfortruth.podbean.com)) during which time he has been an itinerant Bible teacher throughout the UK and Canada. His evangelical and missionary work outside the UK is primarily in Belgium and The Philippines. He is married to Rosemary, with a son and daughter.



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