“Who’s Better Than Who?”

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I Thessalonians 5:12-24

Please find with me the third chapter of the Book of Romans.

Who’s better than who? I would like to begin today with a verse about the nation of Israel. It’s Zechariah 2:8. When you read the Bible with an open mind and heart, over time you begin to see the bigger picture of God’s plan for the human race. And one nation that you find at the center of both history and the future prophecies found in Scripture is the nation of Israel.

So, here’s the verse. Zechariah 2:8 *“For thus saith the Lord of hosts; after the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”*

Sometime back in the five hundreds B.C. a prophet to Israel arrived on the scene by the name of Zechariah. The Jews had gone into captivity into Babylon in 597 B.C. They returned to the land of Israel in the year 539 B. C. And God sent two prophets to encourage them as they began to re-build the Temple, Haggai and Zechariah.

And among the other messages Zechariah preached is this one from his third sermon to the Jews regarding the future of the nation.

So, what is Zechariah saying to the Jews here? Let me clarify just a few words with you.

Zechariah 2:8 *“For thus saith the Lord of hosts; after the glory* [after the nations that attack Israel are defeated] *hath he* [the Father] *sent me* [the Son] *unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you* [Israel] *toucheth the apple of his* [the Father’s] *eye.”*

In his sermon, Zechariah shows us the LORD’s overall attitude towards Israel. And, in essence, he’s saying that if any nation goes to war against Israel, they might as well be fighting God Himself.

So, Biblically, we know how very important Israel is to the LORD. And most Bible scholars will agree with all of the following regarding the Jews.

One, God promised that the Messiah would come to the world through Israel.

Two, God also promised that a specific piece of land was to belong to the Jews forever.

Three, God gave us His Law through the Jews. In the Law of Moses and in the covenants God had with Israel, God states that He has a special relationship between Himself and the Jews.

Four, the LORD’s presence was granted to the Jews in the fiery cloud and in both the Tabernacle and in the Temple.

And five, God also promised that His Messiah would reign on the throne of David in Jerusalem over the entire world.

Now, here’s why I wanted to begin with Zechariah’s words.

Please follow with me at Romans 3:1 *“What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?”*

Haven’t you at some time wondered if there might be one group of people in the world that had a greater advantage than others? Surprisingly, it sure sounds like Paul is implying that the Jews are the ones who have the advantage. Doesn’t it?

So, today’s sermon is titled “Who’s Better Than Who?” Shall we pray?

I think many of us often feel like there are others who are better than us and that they have an advantage we were never given.

Well, for sure, there were some in Paul’s day who felt like they were better than others. And since the Jewish teachers professed to know the Bible so well, they took the “apple of my His eye” portrayal to the extreme.

So, Paul’s question is legitimate. Paul, a Jew, born into a Jewish home to Jewish parents and raised in a Jewish synagogue; mentored by the most influential Jew of his day, the great Gamaliel, Paul knew first hand that it was the Jews of his day that thought that they were better than the entire rest of the world. In other word, the Gentiles.

You might recall Paul’s personal testimony before the Sanhedrim where he said this. Acts 22:*3 “I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.”*

Gamaliel, by the way, the one who mentored Paul in the School of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, was the president of the Sanhedrim and recognized as the most respected, most influential Jew of his day. He was a quote “doctor of the law,” meaning when he preached or taught or even wrote an epistle or even when he interpreted Moses, that his word was right up there with Moses himself.

So, Paul knew what the Jews thought of the Jews. And now, he asks the question, “What advantage does the Jew have in this world?”

Please listen closely regarding the message of Romans three.

First, the advantage the Jews have over the rest of the world is one main thing. Here it is. God gave us the Bible through the Jews.

Now, I realize that the Jews are indeed the “apple of God’s eye.” I realize all the truths of what I showed you about Israel that are taught in the Old Testament. But, according to the Apostle Paul and according to the Holy Spirit Who wrote the Bible, the one advantage the Jews have over the rest of us is that God sent His Word to the world through the Jew. Look with me at verse one again.

Romans 3:1 *“What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? (2) Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”*

The term “oracle” is found just four times in the Bible. It means “a divine utterance, a revelation.” An oracle is simply what God says.

Folks, the LORD used over forty Jewish men to write the sixty-six Books of Scripture. And the lives of these forty Jewish men traversed no less than two thousand years. And that fact of history stands head and shoulders above every other aspect of the people of Israel. Think about it. Forty men over fifteen hundred years writing the same message. This is more than remarkable. It’s miraculous. And who wrote it? Teachers, a King, the son of a king, poets, a tax collector, a fisherman, scholars, a cup-carrier for a king, a military general, a scribe, a Governor, prophets, even a priest of God. You see, the unity of the Bible makes it to this day the most unique Book in the entire history of mankind. One theme, consistent through twenty centuries and put down on parchment by forty different individuals. And now we read it as 1,189 chapters. They all died. But what they wrote lives on into eternity.

So, yes, the Jews have an advantage over the rest of the world. What is their advantage? God used them to write the Scriptures. The Jews have a library with sixty-six books that is attributed to them.

First, the advantage the Jews have is the Bible.

But, what if the Jews didn’t believe the Scriptures? Doesn’t that imply that God was mistaken when He chose the Jews to send His Word to mankind? Paul answers for us.

Second, God is always fair; verse three.

Romans 3:3 *“For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith [faithfulness] of God without effect? (4) God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.*

*(5) But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) (6) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

*(7) For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? (8) And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.”*

Paul asks “What if some were unfaithful? What if some of the Jews were refusing to believe the Bible? What if some Jews rejected His Word? Doesn’t that reflect badly upon God, especially upon His fairness in choosing the Jews?” Wouldn’t that make the faithfulness of God without effect?

Now, think about that with me. There was a lot at stake when God selected the Jews to be the ones to bring the Bible into the world. Why? Because you would have thought that the ones through whom the Word came would have been the ones you could go to for spiritual answers.

And because the entire history of Israel shows unbelief upon unbelief; sin after sin; turning from God to idols; living in disobedience; even at one point throwing the new-born babies into a fire to a god named Molech. And in the entire history of Israel you find God sending His prophets to call His people back to Himself.

Folks, God didn’t take a chance with the Jews. He’s sovereign and He’s righteous and He’s all-wise. And He’s also faithful. And so, Paul’s point is this. Yes, the Jews, some of them, became faithless. And yes, God has to judge the faithless. But, rather than this being evidence of God’s unfaithfulness, it is a testament to His fairness.

Now, suppose someone comes to the LORD at a young age; grows up in a Christian home with godly parents. And that young man is faithful to pray, to study God’s word, to reach others with the Gospel, to teach them God’s ways.

Then, in college something happens that no one expects. He sits under an ungodly professor who convinces him that the Bible is not to be believed and that God does not exist. And that young man forsakes the LORD. Does that young man, by his actions and decisions prove that the Gospel is not true? Not at all.

Instead, it proves that the heart of man constantly needs to depend upon God by simple faith – for everything. The Gospel is still effective and God remains both fair and faithfulness notwithstanding the faithlessness of man.

II Timothy 2:13 *“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”* You see, God and His Word are always trustworthy. He cannot deny Himself just because there are those who walk in unbelief.

There once was a judge who sat on the bench for twenty-nine years. And nearly everyone who came before him found him to be both fair and impartial. Yet, in his thirtieth year, in case after case, he became extremely careless and often disregarded the law and disrespected those who came before him. Now, this judge had to be removed from the bench. And he was. Yet, did his thirtieth year disannul all that he had done in his prior twenty-nine years? No at all. He had been entrusted with carrying out fair and good sentences. Then, after his removal from the bench, no one even considered that there was anything wrong with either the law or the judge who had made those judgments.

So, notwithstanding the sins and utter failure of the nation of Israel, the LORD, not only brought His word to the world, He did so perfectly. The Bible is inspired, not the men who wrote it. The Bible is inerrant, not the men who didn’t believe it. The Bible is complete, notwithstanding the men who didn’t obey it. God chose imperfect men to record His perfect word.

Proverbs 30:5 *“Every word of God is pure …”*

II Peter 1:21 *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*

II Timothy 3:16 *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

First, then, the advantage the Jews have is the Bible.

Second, God is always fair.

Third, Jew = Gentile; verse nine.

Romans 3:9 *“What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (10) as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

*(11) There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:*

*(14) Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: (15) their feet are swift to shed blood: (16) Destruction and misery are in their ways: (17) and the way of peace have they not known: (18) There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Yes, I did say that the Jews had an advantage over the rest of the world. How? By being the one nation through whom we received the Bible. And yes, I am also saying that the Jews are equal the Gentiles. So, you ask, “How?”

Look with me at verse nine. Romans 3:9 *“What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (10) as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: …”*

The Jews may think that because they are the apple of God’s eye that they are better than the Gentiles. But they are not. And how do we know that? Because every man is equal in the sight of the LORD when it comes to our relationship to Adam. We are all sinners. We are all under sin. There is none righteous, no not one.

Folks, no one gets a head start with God; especially the Jews. Yes, they are the ones with the advantage. But when you see what their advantage is, you realize that God sovereignly chose the Jews to bring His Word into the human race. Second, God is always fair, no matter even if the Jews became faithless. And third, the Jew equals the Gentile in this one huge matter – sin.

And Paul concludes his argument this way. Romans 3:21 *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: …”*

Romans 10:12 *“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”*

So, everyone, Jew and Gentile, is a sinner in need of a Savior Who is rich to all who call upon Him. And God has sent Jesus into the world to be our Savior. He’s the Savior for both Jews and Gentiles.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

And God is not willing that any should perish. II Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward,* ***not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance****.”*

In the matter of salvation, are you among those who have repented and believed on Christ? If not, why not? What is holding you back from exercising faith in the LORD Jesus as your Savior?

And He will save anyone who comes to Him with simple faith in Jesus; anyone, Jew or Gentile, lots of sins or a few sins.

So, today, is your day of surrender. Today, you need to deal with yourself, your sins, and the Savior today. What do you need to do? See yourself as a sinner loved by God so much that God sent His Son to die as your Substitute. Then, repent and to believe.

* To Repent = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe = I simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins.

Here’s the Salvation Prayer*. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve judgment for my sins. I believe Jesus died in my place on the Cross to remove that judgment. Please save me and give me your free gift of righteousness. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray?

Now let’s sing Hymn # 56 “To God Be The Glory”