

Why did God Pick the Jews? Deuteronomy 7:6

We are in the midst of a series addressing strange Bible questions. It addresses topics that many have wondered about but seldom hear addressed. We have talked about strange Old Testament laws, where Cain and Abel get their wives, does the Bible endorse polygamy and what about some of the missing books in the Bible. Some of these questions are difficult to answer in just a sentence or two. That is true for today's question as well.

Our premise in all of this is that the Bible is God's Word to our human race. It tells us what we could not otherwise figure out for ourselves. Some of it is easy to understand and other parts are difficult. Today's question falls in the category of the more difficult.

I grew up in a community with a significant Jewish population. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon through grade school my Jewish classmates left school early in order to go to Hebrew school. Celebrating the holidays of Hanukkah, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah were a normal part of community life. When I grew older, I began to hear that Jews were different, special. At church I was told that Jews are God's Chosen People. Within the community I heard anti-Semitic remarks that were mean and bigoted, very different from what I heard at church.

Even without the Bible it is evident that Jews have experienced an amazing history that dates back three thousand years. They went from obscurity to slavery to become a powerful kingdom. Then the kingdom divided and collapsed. Foreign nations invaded and enslaved the people of Israel. A majority of the population disappeared from history. Those who survived took on a new name. Previously called Israelites or Hebrews they became known by the name of one of the surviving tribal groups. Those from Judah got the nickname "Jews". What was once a nation became an ethnic group called Jews and a religion called Judaism.

For reasons far beyond explanation in years that followed Jews have been persecuted and

hated. Some of the worst treatment of Jews came at the hands of those who called themselves Christians. Horrible stereotypes and persistent lies culminated in the Holocaust of World War II in an attempt to eliminate Jews from the face of the earth once and for all.

Many other people groups and languages throughout history have gone the way of the dinosaurs. It is nothing short of amazing that Jews have persisted against formidable opposition. In 1948 the State of Israel was founded as a Jewish homeland and the virtually dead language of Hebrew was resurrected. After nineteen centuries Israel again became the controlling political entity for the city of Jerusalem.

Even someone who neither believes in God nor the Bible must admit Jews are amazing and special. There has never been anything quite like the Jewish people in human history.

Those of us who believe the Bible go back to the Old Testament words of Deuteronomy 7:6: *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."*

But, why would God specially choose anyone to be *"his treasured possession"*? And specifically, why would God choose the Jews? That is a question worthy of a doctoral dissertation. Even then someone would raise a hundred more

unanswered questions. I'm sure some of you will still have unanswered questions today.

But let's start out with a rabbi's answer. Rabbi Shraga Simmons, a contemporary rabbi in Jerusalem, answers the question "Why did God choose the Jewish people?" like this:

"All human beings are God's people, as it says that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Further, the great prophet Malachi said, 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?' (Malachi 2:10). In fact, the Talmud also states that Adam was created from the dust

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of all four corners of the earth (so to speak) so that no one nation could claim the distinction of being better.

“Historically, however, the world slipped away from its relationship with God and eventually the entire world was idolaters. Abraham rediscovered the idea of one God, and chose to accept the challenge to change the world through an understanding of monotheism and morality. Through his dedication and willingness to give up everything for God, he was chosen—and his descendants after him—to become teachers of morality.

“In other words, Abraham chose God, and thus God chose Abraham.”

Nice try! But I think it is the wrong answer. God did not choose Abraham because Abraham chose God. God chose Abraham because God is God. And that becomes the first answer to the question of why God picked the Jews. The answer is that God is God. God does whatever he wants for whatever reason he likes. God never owes us any explanation. He’s the Boss. We are told in Isaiah 55:8-9, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*” declares the Lord. “*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”

The Bible says that God doesn’t even think the way we think, his thinking is in a different category. We humans can never quite measure up to fully understand the way God thinks.

In Daniel 4:35 we are told, “(God) *does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’*”

In the New Testament in Philippians 2:13 we are told, “. . . *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” If God wants to do something, he will do it.

We will talk about some other reasons why God picked the Jews, but the bottom line is that God is God and God does whatever he wants to do. For most of us that’s a difficult concept because most of us tend to be pretty self-centered. We prefer to have the world revolve around us. But that’s not the way the universe works. God would not be God if our choices trumped his choices or his will were subject to our will. God is wise. God is good. He makes wise and good choices whether we understand them or not. He is

right because he is God. God’s will takes precedence over our will every time! The goal of our lives is not to make God like us; it is to make us like God. The sooner we understand this, the better off we are.

If there were no other reason or explanation, this should be sufficient for those of us who believe in God. He chooses whom he chooses and he chose the Jews to be his special people.

What’s interesting is that we do exactly the same thing. The manufacturer calls the color of the car I drive Absolutely Red. I chose the color. Why? Because I like red! So, I chose red. God chose Jews because God chose Jews.

The Number Two answer to the question of why God chose the Jews is because of love. Deuteronomy 7:6-9 says:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

God made a subtle but significant point to the people of Israel and that is that he did not choose them because of their attractiveness. It wasn’t because they were a great and powerful nation; they were a small nation. It wasn’t because they were powerful; they were slaves. It wasn’t because they were righteous; they had a repeated history of sin and rebellion against God.

In Jeremiah 5:23 the prophet said, “. . . *these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away.*” In Ezekiel 2:4 that prophet said, “*The people . . . are obstinate and stubborn.*” In other words, God did not choose Israel because of the way Israel was, but in spite of the way Israel was. God’s love flowed out of him.

It wasn't because the Hebrew people were attractive. God chose Israel as an object lesson of his love. It is easy to love the lovable, rich, attractive and responsive. It takes a far greater love to choose the difficult, rebellious and unresponsive.

When we make choices we have a tendency to go for the very best. At the Dog Pound we choose the puppy with the nice fur, gentle disposition and obedient response. At the Used Car Lot we normally go for the car with the lowest mileage and fewest scratches. When buying a house we select the one with the newest roof and driest basement. God chose and loved Israel unconditionally—rebellion, problems and all.

There is great comfort and joy here for all of us. If we are brutally honest with ourselves we must admit that not much about us appeals to God. But if God chooses and blesses people who have issues and problems, whose lives are a total mess, who are obstinate and stubborn and rebellious, well, then God will do that for us, too. Romans 5:6-8 says:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What was true for the Jews in the Old Testament is equally true for Christians today. We are still sinners but God loves us because that's who God is. It doesn't depend on our lovability or likeability. God chooses because of love.

The third answer to this question of why God chose the Jews is because of others. God had a job he wanted done and he chose the Jews to do the job. The history of the Jewish people actually begins in the first book of the Bible in Genesis chapter 12. In the opening lines of this chapter God is talking to Abram:

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land that I will show you.

"I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those

who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God asked Abram to leave a thriving metropolis of 250,000 people. Archaeologists and historians say it was one of the best places in the ancient world to live. Yet God invited him to leave there and go to an unknown frontier. It took great faith for Abram to say "Yes" to God's call, but God made marvelous promises to Abram. He promised Abram would become a great nation, receive great blessing and have great success. However, God expected that Abram and his descendants would take these blessings and pass them on to all the other peoples of the earth.

God gave his love and his law to the Hebrew people with the expectation that they would become his missionaries to all the other nations of the world. With privilege came responsibility. But the tragic history of the nation is that they wanted to be blessed by God but they didn't want to be a blessing to others. Eventually they lost the blessing of God and the responsibility to tell God's truth and share God's blessings was given to Christians and to the church instead.

Reason Number Four to the question of why God chose the Jews is because of Jesus. For you see, the greatest story in the Bible is not that God chose the Jews. The greatest story in the Bible is that God chose Jesus. It is the story of God providing salvation for humankind.

God created us in his image, but we have all sinned and rebelled against God. Our only hope of getting back to God and gaining eternal life was for God to intervene and send a Savior. He chose to send his own Son. The eternal invisible Son of God was chosen to become human, live a perfect life, die on a cross, rise from the dead and give eternal life to all who believe.

If God's Son was to become human, that meant he had to have a human family. God could choose any family in history for his Son and he chose the family of Israel. You could take a red marker and trace the line of the Messiah from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to David and down through the generations to Joseph and Mary.

Let us not forget that every blessing we have comes from God!

The opening page of the New Testament outlines the family tree.

From the “big picture” this is the most important reason of all. Jesus is what the Bible is all about. Jesus is the hope of the world. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is our Savior from sin. Providing a family for Jesus was reason enough for God to choose the Jews.

Before we leave our Bible question for today there is one more important clarification to make. There is a difference between God choosing the Jews as a people and personal salvation. It was a wonderful blessing for the people of Israel to be so specially chosen and blessed by God. However, that did not guarantee that their individual sins were forgiven or that they all would go to heaven when they died. Personal salvation is based on individual faith.

Suppose we compare this to America. It seems obvious to me that God has wonderfully and unusually blessed the United States of America. We have freedom and prosperity. We have greater access to the gospel of Jesus Christ than any country at any time in history. I love being an American.

But with blessing comes responsibility. The danger is that we will become proud. It saddens me sometimes when I hear Americans talk as if we are the best nation in the world because we are better than other people. That’s simply not true.

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Just because someone is an American doesn’t mean that person is a Christian. Having U.S. citizenship doesn’t guarantee a place in heaven. On this the Bible is quite clear. It says in Acts 4:12, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” So it is through a personal faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of all the blessings that God gives that we have eternal life.

Let’s sum up our study of the question: Why did God pick the Jews?

~ Because God is God and he can do whatever he chooses.

~ Because of love—an object lesson in loving the unlikely.

~ Because of others—to bless the nations.

~ Because of Jesus—to provide a human family for the Son of God.

To all of this we add that with blessing comes the responsibility of what we do with the blessing God gives. And, for everyone, individual salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

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