

What About Israel?

Romans 9:1-5

Introduction

The Voice of the Martyrs is an organization that seeks to give a voice to many of the Christian martyrs around the globe – one story:

Farid was leading a bible study in Afghanistan with 5 other young men – when several men dressed in dark clothing – carrying Ak-47s - -- pounded on the door and entered the apartment. They threw Farid to the floor – hands tied behind his back and a knife held inches from his neck.

Farid prayed: ‘Father - if this is the time for me to die – I forgive these people who want to kill me.’

He closed his eyes – waiting for the end to come – but nothing happened

Eventually he stood up and discovered his hands were no longer tied – he walked over to the door – when one of the attackers said: ‘You’re not leaving – sit down dog’

The other pointed his Ak-47 at Farid – and pulled the trigger – click – but nothing happened - - - the rifle had jammed. - - - Again – another pull of the trigger and nothing

Farid decided now was a good time to make a run for it – he ran down the stairs 3 or 4 at a time – heard shots behind him – saw bullets chipping the walls in front of him - - - but he escaped unharmed

Ultimately – all 6 of the Bible study attendees escaped that night – and when the police investigated the attack – they found a bag containing an Al-Qaeda flag, two swords and a video camera. Apparently the men were planning to videotape the beheading and post it online

This was Afghanistan before America’s withdrawal. Now under the Taliban – things are much worse

Farid: ‘This is a Muslim country . . . they don’t like non-Muslim people coming to preach. In the Quran it is written that if somebody rejects Islam, you must kill them.’

That is just one of hundreds of stories of Islamic persecution of Christians in Muslim majority countries

At the close of Romans 8 – we read these tremendous words of Paul

Romans 8:35-36 - 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."'

Romans 8:37 - 'But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.'

Nothing – not life or death can separate us from the love of God

The whole flow of the book of Romans – is about the gospel of God – which proclaims salvation thru faith in Jesus Christ to both the Jew and the Greek

When one considers the origins of the Christian faith - - - we know that Christianity arose from that small corner of the world – we call Israel

Jesus was born in Bethlehem – a descendant of David according to the flesh

He worked miracles amongst the Jews / - - - walked on water – the Sea of Galilee - - - healed the sick / fed the 5000 – all in Israel

He was crucified in Jerusalem /buried / risen again on the third day

The 12 apostles were all Jews

The early church – in the first few months following Jesus' ascension was comprised largely of Jewish believers

Acts 6:7 - 'And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.'

But then – a number of Jews turned on Stephen / said he preached against the Law and the holy place - - - they stoned him to death

Acts 8:1 - 'And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.'

The Jews continued their rejection of Jesus – in the treatment of the church

John 1:11-12 - 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' [KJV]

John said – the Jews did not receive Jesus – but others did - - - namely Gentiles would be brought into the church in vast numbers

The church of the 1st century – came to be made up largely of Gentiles who responded to God's call

A preacher and a barber were walking through city slums. The barber spoke: “If God was as kind as you say, he wouldn’t permit all this poverty, disease and squalor,” “He wouldn’t allow these poor street people to get addicted to drugs / I cannot believe in a God who permits these things.”

The minister was silent for a few moments - - - then they came across a man with shaggy hair and an overgrown ragged looking beard.

The preacher: “You can’t be a good barber, or you wouldn’t permit a man like this to continue living here without a haircut and a shave,”

The barber responded, “You can’t blame me for that man’s condition. He has never come to my shop. If he had, I could’ve fixed him up real good!”

The preacher: “Then don’t blame God for allowing people to continue in their evil ways,” “He invites them to come and be saved.”

He came to his own – and His own received Him not

In the flow of Romans – Paul now wants to address the problem of Jewish unbelief as it relates to our faith – and the church

I. Paul's Love for the Jews - vv. 1-3

Paul knows that many Jews of his day have rejected Christ - - - and have not entered into the salvation which Jesus came to bring

They not only rejected Jesus – they began to persecute the followers of Jesus – seeking to stamp out the faith

There is a logical reason why Paul brings up the Jewish people at this point

Paul has just pointed out how God is absolutely faithful to His promises and that nothing can separate us from the love of God . . .

A person might object at this point and say – ‘Paul – the Jews were God’s chosen people of the OT and now you are saying that many of them are not saved.’

‘If the Jew is as lost as you say he is – then God has failed – He does not keep His Word.’

What about the Jews – the chosen people of God in the OT?

Douglas Wilson: 'It might look like Paul has painted himself into a corner.'

Romans 9-11 will address the issue of Jewish unbelief

One key text where Jesus lamented the obstinacy of Israel

Matt. 23:37-39 - 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord."

We note in that lament – Israel is being left desolate - - - but it is not permanent - - - it is until something else takes place – namely a turning to the Lord which would take place at a day in the future

In the meantime – a remnant of the Jews do respond to God's call

Arnold Fruchtenbaum - - - of Ariel ministries - - - is a Jewish Christian / became a Christian when his family immigrated to NY in 1951

The family had come into contact with a Lutheran minister - - - and Arnold at the age of 13 put his faith in Christ - - - but his father did not approve - - - and restricted him from reading the Bible / the NT

Eventually Arnold went on to study at Cedarville / Dallas seminary

Arnold Fruchtenbaum – one of a small number of Jewish Christians - - believes that the day Israel turns to the Lord [as a nation] ultimately comes at the close of the Tribulation period - - - when God will pour out His Spirit - - - and they will cry out for deliverance to Jesus – their long-rejected Messiah

i.e. – they will finally embrace the Messiah – and Jesus will return

Fruchtenbaum is echoing what Paul teaches here in Romans 9-11

Romans 11:25-27 - 'For I do not want you, brethren to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'

Right now – a period of partial hardening - - - this rejection of their Messiah is not permanent or final

God is gathering Gentiles into the church

But – a day will come when God will turn again and draw a remnant of the nation unto Himself

A prophecy in Zechariah pointed to this day

Zechariah 12:10 - 'And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.'

That has not happened yet

The Israel that will be blessed will be the Israel that embraces their Messiah Jesus

MacArthur: 'Just because there are some Jews who don't believe does not nullify the faithfulness of God.'

Paul – in his day - was seen by many of his fellow Jews as having become a traitor to His people

In fact – shortly after his conversion to Christianity we read of persecution against Him

Acts 9:23-25 - 'And when many days elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.'

Paul's first experience of church persecution [on the receiving end!] – he had to flee Damascus – escaping by a basket being lowered from the wall!

He would go on to face many other persecutions

II Corinthians 11:24 - 'Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.'

He had been stoned and left for dead at Lystra – by the Jews

Is he angry at his brothers?

Does He want God to wipe them out with a lightning bolt? / fire from heaven?

No – instead we find him saying – 'If I could be cursed in their place – I would'

Paul knows he can't actually trade places with the people of Israel – but he is conveying his love for his people

His heart was in sorrow because the Jews of his day were rejecting Christ to the ruin of their souls

*** Paul says, 'If I could go to hell so they could be saved – I would!' - but he knows that he cannot

Charles Spurgeon: 'If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies; and if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees imploring them to stay . . . if hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned or un-prayed for.'

That is the heart of Paul

R.C. Sproul said – he'd do a lot of things if it would result in the salvation of his unbelieving friends but he doesn't think he would go to hell for them!

Let no one go there unwarned and un-prayed for

Are there unbelievers you pray for that God would open their eyes to the truth? / keep praying!

II. The Privileges of the Jews - vv. 4-5

The Jew had so many privileges that should have caused them to eagerly embrace Christ

This is what the Jew had:

Adoption as sons

Israel's unique place among the nations of the world – God established a covenant with them

Exodus 19:6 - 'and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'

Benjamin Disraeli – a Jewish man – served as prime minister of England [1874-1880]. When he was elected to Parliament at the age of 33 – He was criticized by a Roman Catholic leader – Daniel O'Connell – who referred disparagingly to Disraeli's Jewish background

Disraeli replied:

Benjamin Disraeli: 'Yes sir, I am a Jew and I remind my illustrious opponent that while the ancestors of that right honorable gentlemen were brutal savages eating nuts in a German forest, my ancestors were serving as priests in the temple of Solomon and were giving Law and religion to the world.'

That was among the privileges of being Jewish

The glory

This refers to the glory cloud that came into their history – in the wilderness – leading them – also the glory cloud that filled the temple

We are told of Solomon's temple – when they dedicated the temple

I Kings 8:10-11 - 'and it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.'

Later – the glory departed – in the book of Ezekiel

Jesus was a physical return of the glory to Israel – shown on the Mt. of Transfiguration

The covenants

The covenants: Abrahamic / Davidic / Mosaic / the New Covenant

The Law

Israel was taught that there is a moral Law in this universe – that some things are right and some things are wrong

The universe has meaning – God cares how we live / how we treat our fellow man / how we worship God – there will be a day of judgment

C.S. Lewis: 'God selected one particular people and spent several centuries hammering into their heads the sort of God He was - that there was only one of Him and that He cared about right conduct. Those people were the Jews and the OT gives an account of the hammering process.'

It was a privilege to be given God's Law – to have their moral code spelled out

The temple service

The greatest privilege: Jesus was born a Jew according to the flesh

It was the privilege of the Jews – to bring Christ into the world

John portrays this in a vision in Revelation

Revelation 12:1, 2 - 'And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.'

Revelation 12:3, 4 - 'And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.'

A gruesome picture!

Who is the woman?

The RCC tells us the woman is Mary / the baby is Jesus

We agree the baby is Jesus – whom Satan sought to destroy

But - the woman is actually Israel

This is the exact same imagery Joseph once saw in a dream [Genesis 37] – referring to His family – [Jacob the Father was the sun / mother the moon – 11 brothers [stars] – they all bowed down to him]

Of course – the brothers rejected Joseph and his dreams - - - sold him into slavery - - but later due to famine – went down to Egypt and bowed down before Joseph who had been exalted as a ruler

The rejected brother - - - was then embraced – same thing that would one day occur with the person of Jesus

Rejected – but later embraced

Conclusion

J. V. McGee shares the story of a man who was sick and dying – his wife asked if Vernon McGee could come and speak with him. He came and shared the gospel with the man. The man listened very politely and then said, 'I would say, 'yes – I will accept Christ as my Savior' – in fact – I am going to do it. But I want to tell you this: I have played and trifled with God all my life. I have been down to an altar 25 times. I have made promises to Him and then turned from Him and I have never been sincere. Honestly, I cannot tell you right now whether I am sincere or not.'

He died a few weeks later

Charles Spurgeon: "Jesus is not to be trifled with. Sinners shall find He has wrath if mercy be rejected."

Only God can sort out that kind of a heart

II Timothy 2:19 - 'Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.'

There is grace for those who genuinely receive Him

Romans 10:13 - 'For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The Lord's Supper