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Forward

The Hebrews passed on their beliefs through oral tradition. For many years in many places, writing was primitive or nonexistent. Stories were told to children who passed them on to their children.

Genealogies gave a skeletal outline that helped people remember the stories. For centuries these genealogies were added to and passed down from family to family.

Even more important than preserving family tradition, genealogies were included to confirm the Bible's promise that the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be born into the line of Abraham.

The Gospel of Matthew links the Old and New Testaments and contains many references that show how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Because Jesus is the most complete revelation of God, we cannot fully know God apart from Christ; and because God appointed Jesus to bring God and man together, we cannot come to God by another path.

The Jews, like everyone else, can find salvation only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Like Paul, we should wish that all Jews might be saved. We should pray for them and lovingly share the Good News with them.

In this study, you can see how God was fulfilling his promise to the Jews, as was given to Abraham, and has freely extended this promise to all who call on the name of Christ Jesus with believing faith.

Chapter 1



Why genealogies is important to the Jews

Genesis 5:1

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

The Bible contains several lists of ancestors, called *genealogies*.

There are two basic views concerning these lists:

- (1) They are complete, recording the entire history of a family, tribe, or nation; or
- (2) They are not intended to be exhaustive and may include only famous people or the heads of families. “Became the father of” could also mean “was the ancestor of.”

Why are genealogies included in the Bible?

The Hebrews passed on their beliefs through oral tradition. For many years in many places, writing was primitive or nonexistent. Stories were told to children who passed them on to their children.

Genealogies gave a skeletal outline that helped people remember the stories. For centuries these genealogies were added to and passed down from family to family.

Even more important than preserving family tradition, genealogies were included to confirm the Bible's promise that the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be born into the line of Abraham.

Genealogies point out an interesting characteristic of God. People are important to him as individuals, not just as races or nations.

Therefore God refers to people by name, mentioning their life span and descendants.

The next time you feel overwhelmed in a vast crowd, remember that the focus of God's attention and love is on the individual—and on you!

Matthew 1:1 – 4:11

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

A. BIRTH AND PREPARATION OF JESUS, THE KING

Matthew opens his Gospel with a genealogy to prove that Jesus is the descendant of both King David and Abraham, just as the Old Testament had predicted. Jesus' birth didn't go unnoticed, for both shepherds and magi came to worship him.

The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah to appear. Finally, he was born, but the Jews didn't recognize him because they were looking for a different kind of king.

Presenting this genealogy was one of the most interesting ways that Matthew could begin a book for a Jewish audience. Because a person's family line proved his or her standing as one of God's chosen people, Matthew began by showing that Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, the father of all Jews, and a direct descendant of David, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah's line.

The facts of this ancestry were carefully preserved. This is the first of many proofs recorded by Matthew to show that Jesus is the true Messiah.

More than 400 years had passed since the last Old Testament prophecies, and faithful Jews all over the world were still waiting for the Messiah (Luke 3:15).

Matthew wrote this book to Jews to present Jesus as King and Messiah, the promised descendant of David who would reign forever (Isaiah 11:1-5).

The Gospel of Matthew links the Old and New Testaments and contains many references that show how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Jesus entered human history when the land of Palestine was controlled by Rome and considered an insignificant outpost of the vast and mighty Roman Empire.

The presence of Roman soldiers in Israel gave the Jews military peace, but at the price of oppression, slavery, injustice, and immorality. Into this kind of world came the promised Messiah.

In the first 17 verses we meet 46 people whose lifetimes span 2,000 years. All were ancestors of Jesus, but they varied considerably in personality, spirituality, and experience.

Some were heroes of faith—like Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, and David. Some had shady reputations—like Rahab and Tamar. Many were very ordinary—like Hezron, Ram, Nahshon, and Akim. And others were evil—like Manasseh and Abijah. God’s work in history is not limited by human failures or sins, and he works through ordinary people.

Just as God used all kinds of people to bring his Son into the world, he uses all kinds today to accomplish his will. And God wants to use you.

Jews are not the only people that God loves.

Ruth 1:16

And Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goes', I will go; and where thou lodges, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Ruth was a Moabitess, but that didn't stop her from worshiping the true God, nor did it stop God from accepting her worship and blessing her greatly.

The Jews were not the only people God loved. God chose the Jews to be the people through whom the rest of the world would come to know him. This was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was born as a Jew.

Through him, the entire world can come to know God. Acts 10:35 says that "(God) accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." God accepts all who worship him; he works through people regardless of their race, sex, or nationality.

The book of Ruth is a perfect example of God's impartiality. Although Ruth belonged to a race often despised by Israel, she was blessed because of her faithfulness. She became a great-grandmother of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus.

No one should feel disqualified to serve God because of race, sex, or national background. And God can use every circumstance to build his kingdom.

The Jews allowed to remain together during Babylonian exile.

2 Kings 24:14

And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

The Babylonian policy for taking captives was different from that of the Assyrians who moved most of the people out and resettled the land with foreigners (see the note on ■2 Kings 17:24).

The Babylonians took only the strong and skilled, leaving the poor and weak to rule the land, thus elevating them to positions of authority and winning their loyalty.

The leaders were taken to Babylonian cities where they were permitted to live together, find jobs, and become an important part of the society.

This policy kept the Jews united and faithful to God throughout the captivity and made it possible for their return in the days of Zerubbabel and Ezra as recorded in the book of Ezra.

Why many Jews decided not to return to Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:5-6

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Cyrus was king over the entire region that had once been Assyria and Babylon. Assyria had deported the Israelites from the northern kingdom (Israel) in 722 B.C. Babylon, the next world power, had taken Israelites captive from the southern kingdom (Judah) in 586 B.C.

Therefore, when the Medo-Persian Empire came to power, King Cyrus's proclamation of freedom went to all the original 12 tribes, but only Judah and Benjamin responded and returned to rebuild God's temple.

The ten tribes of the northern kingdom had been so fractured and dispersed by Assyria, and so much time had elapsed since their captivity, that many might have been unsure of their real heritage. Thus they were unwilling to share in the vision of rebuilding the temple.

God moved the hearts of the leaders, family heads, priests, and Levites and gave them a great desire to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Major changes begin on the inside as God works on our attitudes, beliefs, and desires. These inner changes lead to faithful actions. After 48 years of captivity, the arrogant Jewish nation had been humbled.

When the people's attitudes and desires changed, God ended their punishment and gave them another opportunity to go home and try again.

Paul reminds us that "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Doing God's will begins with your desires.

Are you willing to be humble, to be open to his opportunities, and to move at his direction? Ask God to give you the desire to follow him more closely.

Many Jews chose to go to Jerusalem, but many more chose to remain in Babylon rather than return to their homeland. The journey back to Jerusalem was difficult, dangerous, and expensive, lasting over four months. Travel conditions were poor; Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside were in ruins; and the people living in the area were hostile.

Persian records indicate that many Jews in captivity had accumulated great wealth. Returning to Jerusalem would have meant giving up everything they had and starting over.

Many people couldn't bring themselves to do that; they preferred wealth and security to the sacrifice that God's work would require. Their priorities were upside down (Mark 4:18-19).

We must not let our comfort, security, or material possessions prevent us from doing what God wants.

Why did Haman want to destroy the Jews?

Esther 3:5-6

And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence,
then was Haman full of wrath.

And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had
sewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy
all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even
the people of Mordecai.

Haman enjoyed the power and prestige of his position, and he was enraged when Mordecai did not respond with the expected reverential bow. Haman's anger was not directed just toward Mordecai, but toward what Mordecai stood for—the Jews' dedication to God as the only authority worthy of reverence.

Haman's attitude was prejudiced: he hated a group of people because of a difference in belief or culture.

Prejudice grows out of personal pride—considering oneself better than others. In the end, Haman was punished for his arrogant attitude (Esther 7:9-10). God will harshly judge those who are prejudiced or whose pride causes them to look down on others.

Chapter 2



Matthew's Gospel was written to the Jews

Matthew 1:1

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

How Herod the Great became popular with the Jews

Matthew 2:1

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Bethlehem is a small town five miles south of Jerusalem. It sits on a high ridge over 2,000 feet above sea level. It is mentioned in more detail in the Gospel of Luke. Luke also explains why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, rather than in Nazareth, their hometown.

The land of Israel was divided into four political districts and several lesser territories.

Judea was to the south
Samaria in the middle,
Galilee to the north, and
Idumea to the southeast.

Bethlehem of Judea (also called Judah, Matthew 2:6) had been prophesied as the Messiah's birthplace (Micah 5:2).

Jerusalem was also in Judea and was the seat of government for Herod the Great, king over all four political districts.

After Herod's death, the districts were divided among three separate rulers (see the note on (Matthew 2:19-22)).

Although he was a ruthless, evil man who murdered many in his own family, Herod the Great supervised the renovation of the temple, making it much larger and more beautiful. This made him popular with many Jews. Jesus would visit Jerusalem many times because the great Jewish festivals were held there.

Not much is known about these Magi (traditionally called wise men). We don't know where they came from or how many there were.

Tradition says they were men of high position from Parthian, near the site of ancient Babylon.

How did they know that the star represented the Messiah?

- (1) They could have been Jews who remained in Babylon after the exile and knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's coming.

- (2) They may have been eastern astrologers who studied ancient manuscripts from around the world. Because of the Jewish exile centuries earlier, they would have had copies of the Old Testament in their land.
- (3) They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah.

Some scholars say these Magi were each from a different land, representing the entire world bowing before Jesus. These men from faraway lands recognized Jesus as the Messiah when most of God's chosen people in Israel did not. Matthew pictures Jesus as King over the whole world, not just Judea.

The Magi traveled thousands of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship, and gifts.

This is so different from the approach people often take today. We expect God to come looking for us, to explain himself, prove who he is, and give *us* gifts. But those who are wise still seek and worship Jesus today, not for what they can get, but for whom he is.

The Magi said they saw Jesus' star. Balaam referred to a coming "star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17).

Some say this star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars in 6 B.C., and others offer other explanations. But couldn't God, who created the heavens, have created a special star to signal the arrival of his Son?

Whatever the nature of the star, these Magi traveled thousands of miles searching for a king, and they found him

Jews in Egypt in Jesus' day

Matthew 2:14-15

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Going to Egypt was not unusual because there were colonies of Jews in several major Egyptian cities. These colonies had developed during the time of the great captivity (see Jeremiah 43-44).

There is an interesting parallel between this flight to Egypt and Israel's history. As an infant nation, Israel went to Egypt, just as Jesus did as a child. God led Israel out (Hosea 11:1); God brought Jesus back. Both events show God working to save his people.

Why the many Jews hated Nazareth.

Luke 1:26

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

Gabriel appeared not only to Zechariah and to Mary but also to the prophet Daniel more than 500 years earlier (Daniel 8:15-17; Daniel

9:21). Each time Gabriel appeared, he brought important messages from God.

Nazareth, Joseph and Mary's hometown was a long way from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and worship. Located on a major trade route, Nazareth was frequently visited by Gentile merchants and Roman soldiers.

It was known for its independent and aloof attitude. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth. Nevertheless, the people of Nazareth would reject him as the Messiah (Luke 4:22-30).

Why the Jews hated tax collectors and paying taxes.

Matthew 9:9

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

Matthew was a Jew who was appointed by the Romans to be the area's tax collector. He collected taxes from the citizens as well as from merchants passing through town.

Tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected, but most of them overcharged and kept the profits. Thus, tax collectors were hated by the Jews because of their reputation for cheating and because of their support of Rome.

When Jesus called Matthew to be one of his disciples, Matthew got up and followed, leaving a lucrative career.

When God calls you to follow or obey him, do you do it with as much abandon as Matthew? Sometimes the decision to follow Christ requires difficult or painful choices. Like Matthew, we must decide to leave behind those things that would keep us from following Christ.

Mark 2:14

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Levi is another name for Matthew, the disciple who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. See Matthew's Profile for more information.

Capernaum was a key military center for Roman troops, as well as a thriving business community. Several major highways intersected in Capernaum, with merchants passing through from as far away as Egypt to the south and Mesopotamia to the north.

Levi (Matthew), a Jew, was appointed by the Romans to be the area's tax collector. He collected taxes from citizens as well as from merchants passing through town.

Tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected. Most of them overcharged and vastly enriched themselves. The Jews because of their reputation for cheating and their support of Rome despised tax collectors. The Jews must also have hated to think that some of the money collected went to support pagan religions and temples.

The day that Levi met Jesus, Levi held a meeting at his house to introduce others to Jesus. Levi didn't waste any time starting to witness!

Some people feel that new believers should wait for maturity or training before they begin to tell others about Christ. But like Levi, new believers can share their faith right away with whatever knowledge, skill, or experience they already have.

Chapter 3



Why Jesus told his message to the Jews first.

Matthew 10:5-6

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Why didn't Jesus send the disciples to the Gentiles or the Samaritans? A Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew. The Samaritans were a race that resulted from intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles after the Old Testament captivities (see 2 Kings 17:24).

Jesus asked his disciples to go only to the Jews because he came *first* to the Jews (Romans 1:16). God chose them to tell the rest of the world about him. Jewish disciples and apostles preached the gospel of the risen

Christ all around the Roman Empire, and soon Gentiles were pouring into the church.

The Bible clearly teaches that God's message of salvation is for *all* people, regardless of race, sex, or national origin (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 25:6; Isaiah 56:3-7; Malachi 1:11; Acts 10:34-35; Romans 3:29-30; Galatians 3:28).

The Jews misunderstood Messiah's true role.

Matthew 10:7

And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The Jews were waiting for the Messiah to usher in his kingdom. They hoped for a political and military kingdom that would free them from Roman rule and bring back the days of glory under David and Solomon.

But Jesus was talking about a spiritual kingdom. The gospel today is that the kingdom is still *near*. Jesus, the Messiah, has already begun his kingdom on earth in the hearts of his followers.

One day the kingdom will be fully realized. Then evil will be destroyed and all people will live in peace with one another.

Mark 9:12-13

And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restores all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught.

But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.

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One day the kingdom will be fully realized. Then evil will be destroyed and all people will live in peace with one another.

Luke 24:21

But we trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done.

The disciples from Emmaus were counting on Jesus to redeem Israel—that is, to rescue the nation from its enemies. Most Jews believed that the Old Testament prophecies pointed to a military and political Messiah; they didn't realize that the Messiah had come to redeem people from slavery to sin.

When Jesus died, therefore, they lost all hope. They didn't understand that Jesus' death offered the greatest hope possible.

How the Jews viewed the rich.

Matthew 19:25-26

When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The disciples were astonished. They thought that if anyone could be saved, it would be the rich, whom their culture considered especially blessed by God.

Herod helped the Jews only for political purposes.

Luke 1:5

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

This was Herod the Great, confirmed by the Roman Senate as king of the Jews. Only half Jewish himself and eager to please his Roman superiors, Herod expanded and beautified the Jerusalem temple—but he placed a Roman eagle over the entrance.

When he helped the Jews, it was for political purposes and not because he cared about their God. Herod the Great later ordered a massacre of infants in a futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus, whom some were calling the new “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:16-18).

A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about 20,000 priests throughout the country—far too many to minister in the temple at one time.

Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1,000 each, according to David’s directions (1 Chronicles 24:3-19).

Zechariah was a member of the Abijah division, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the temple and burn incense. Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sacred room, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah.

But it was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place—perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth.

Why many Jews hated Samaritans.

Luke 10:33

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him

There was deep hatred between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews saw themselves as pure descendants of Abraham, while the Samaritans were a mixed race produced when Jews from the northern kingdom intermarried with other peoples after Israel's exile.

To this law expert, the person least likely to act correctly would be the Samaritan. In fact, he could not bear to say "Samaritan" in answer to Jesus' question. This "expert's" attitude betrayed his lack of the very thing that he had earlier said the law commanded—love.

Pilate harassed the Jews

Luke 23:1

And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, where Jerusalem was located. He seemed to take special pleasure in harassing the Jews. For example, Pilate had taken money from the temple treasury and had used it to build an aqueduct. And he had insulted the Jewish religion by bringing imperial images into the city.

As Pilate well knew, such acts could backfire. If the people were to lodge a formal complaint against his administration, Rome might remove him from his post. Pilate was already beginning to feel insecure in his position when the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to trial.

Would he continue to badger the Jews and risk his political future, or would he give in to their demands and condemn a man who, he was quite sure, was innocent? That was the question facing Pilate that springtime Friday morning nearly 2,000 years ago.

Why Jesus said, “Salvation is from the Jews”.

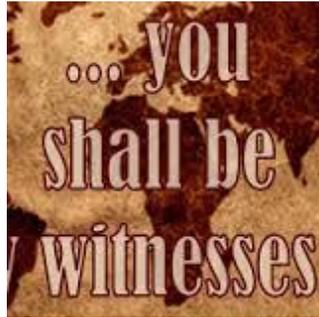
John 4:22

Ye worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

When Jesus said, “Salvation is from the Jews,” he meant that only through the Jewish Messiah would the whole world find salvation. God had promised that through the Jewish race the whole earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

The Old Testament prophets had called the Jews to be a light to the other nations of the world, bringing them to knowledge of God; and they had predicted the Messiah’s coming.

Chapter 4



God's original purpose for the Jews

Acts 3:25

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant that God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed.

God promised Abraham that he would bless the world through Abraham's descendants, the Jewish race (Genesis 12:3), from which the Messiah would come.

God intended the Jewish nation to be a separate and holy nation that would teach the world about God, introduce the Messiah, and then carry on his work in the world. After the days of Solomon, the nation gave up its mission to tell the world about God. Here too, in apostolic times as well as in the time Jesus spent on earth, Israel rejected its Messiah.

Jewish/Gentile conflict a barrier to spreading the gospel.

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

But in every nation he that feared him, and worked righteousness, is accepted with him.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel in the first century was the Jewish-Gentile conflict. Most of the early believers were Jewish, and to them it was scandalous even to think of associating with Gentiles. But God told Peter to take the gospel to a Roman, and Peter obeyed despite his background and personal feelings. (Later Peter struggled with this again—see Galatians 2:11-14.)

God was making it clear that the Good News of Christ is for everyone! We should not allow any barrier—language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level—to keep us from telling others about Christ.

In every nation there are hearts restless for God, ready to receive the gospel—but someone must take it to them. Seeking God is not enough—people must find him. How then shall seekers find God without someone to point the way?

Is God asking you to show someone the way to him?

Most Jews thought salvation was for them alone.

Acts 11:1

Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God.

A Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew; the Jewish believers are sometimes referred to as “the circumcised believers” (Acts 11:2). Most Jewish believers thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them (Exodus 19-20).

A group in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they became Jews. Both were mistaken. God chose the Jews and taught them his laws so they could bring the message of salvation to *all* people (see Genesis 12:3; Psalm 22:27; Isaiah 42:4; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 56:3-7; Isaiah 60:1-3; Jeremiah 16:19-21; Zech. 2:11; Malachi 1:11; Romans 15:9-12).

The Jews found it difficult to accept Gentiles.

Acts 11:8

“‘Never, Lord,’ I replied. ‘I have never eaten anything forbidden by our Jewish laws.’”

God had promised throughout Scripture that he would reach the nations. This began with his general promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18) and became very specific in Malachi’s statement: “My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun” (Malachi 1:11). But this was an extremely difficult truth for Jews, even Jewish believers, to accept. The Jewish believers understood how certain prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, but they overlooked other Old Testament teachings. Too often we are inclined to accept only the parts of God’s Word that appeal to us and support our own agendas, ignoring the teachings we don’t like. We must accept all of God’s Word as absolute truth.

Why the gospel was to go first to the Jews.

Acts 13:46

Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that this Good News from God be given first to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life—well, we will offer it to Gentiles.

Why was it necessary for the gospel to go first to the Jews? God planned that through the Jewish nation *the entire* world would come to know God (Genesis 12:3).

Paul, a Jew himself, loved his people (Romans 9:1-5) and wanted to give them every opportunity to join him in proclaiming God's salvation. Unfortunately, many Jews did not recognize Jesus as Messiah, and they did not understand that God was offering salvation to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who comes to him through faith in Christ.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles.

Why did the message go to the Jews first? They had been God's special people for more than 2,000 years, ever since God chose Abraham and promised great blessings to his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3).

God did not choose the Jews because they deserved to be chosen (Deut. 7:7-8; Deut. 9:4-6), but because he wanted to show his love and mercy to them, teach them, and prepare them to welcome his Messiah into the world. God chose them, not to play favorites, but so that they would tell the world about his plan of salvation.

For centuries the Jews had been learning about God by obeying his laws, keeping his feasts, and living according to his moral principles.

Often they would forget God's promises and requirements; often they would have to be disciplined; but still they had a precious heritage of belief in the one true God.

Of all the people on earth, the Jews should have been the most ready to welcome the Messiah and to understand his mission and message—and some of them were (see Luke 2:25, 36-38).

Of course, the disciples and the great apostle Paul were faithful Jews who recognized in Jesus God's most precious gift to the human race.

How Paul spoke to them.

Acts 17:2-3

As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he interpreted the Scriptures to the people.

He was explaining and proving the prophecies about the sufferings of the Messiah and his rising from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah."

A synagogue, a group of Jews who gathered for teaching and prayer, could be established wherever there were ten Jewish males. Paul's regular practice was to preach in synagogues as long as the Jews allowed it.

Often those who weren't Jews would come to these services and hear Paul's preaching.

When Paul spoke in the synagogues, he wisely began by talking about Old Testament writings and explaining how the Messiah fulfilled them, moving from the known to the unknown.

This is a good strategy for us. When we witness for Christ, we should begin where people are, affirming the truth they do know, and then we can present Christ, the One who is truth.

Chapter 5



All must have a change of heart

Romans 2:28-29

For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision.

circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. Whoever has that kind of change seeks praise from God, not from people.

To be a Jew meant you were in God's family, an heir to all his promises. Yet Paul made it clear that membership in God's family is based on internal, not external, qualities.

All whose hearts are right with God are real Jews—that is, part of God's family (see also Galatians 3:7).

Attending church or being baptized, confirmed, or accepted for membership is not enough, just as submitting to circumcision was not enough for the Jews. God desires our heartfelt devotion and obedience. (See also Deut. 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4).

Advantages of the Jewish nation

Romans 3:2

Yes, being a Jew has many advantages. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

The Jewish nation had many advantages.

- (1) They were entrusted with God's laws ("the very words of God," Exodus 19-20; Deut. 4:8).
- (2) They were the race through which the Messiah came to earth (Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 1:1-17).
- (3) They were the beneficiaries of covenants with God himself (Genesis 17:1-16; Exodus 19:3-6).

But these privileges did not make them better than anyone else (see Romans 3:9). In fact, because of them the Jews were even more responsible to live up to God's requirements.

The remnant of Jews that will be saved

Romans 9:27-29

Concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out,

"Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand on the seashore, only a small number will be saved.

For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth quickly and with finality."

And Isaiah said in another place, "If the Lord Almighty had not spared a few of us, we would have been wiped out as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah."

Isaiah prophesied that only a small number—a remnant—of God's original people, the Jews, would be saved. Paul saw this happening in every city where he preached. Even though he went to the Jews first, relatively few ever accepted the message. Romans 9:27 and Romans 9:28 are based on Isaiah 10:22-23; and Romans 9:29 is from Isaiah 1:9.

What will happen to those who believe in God but not in Christ?

Romans 10:1

Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved.

What will happen to the Jewish people who believe in God but not in Christ? Since they believe in the same God, won't they be saved? If that were true, Paul would not have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to teach them about Christ.

Because Jesus is the most complete revelation of God, we cannot fully know God apart from Christ; and because God appointed Jesus to bring God and man together, we cannot come to God by another path.

The Jews, like everyone else, can find salvation only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Like Paul, we should wish that all Jews

might be saved. We should pray for them and lovingly share the Good News with them.

Not all Jews have rejected God's message.

Mark 11:2

"Go into that village over there," he told them, "and as soon as you enter it, you will see a colt tied there that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here."

This was Sunday of the week that Jesus would be crucified, and the great Passover festival was about to begin.

Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world during this weeklong celebration to remember the great exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 12:37-51). Many in the crowds had heard of or seen Jesus and were hoping he would come to the temple (John 11:55-57).

Jesus did come, not as a warring king on a horse or in a chariot, but as a gentle and peaceable king on a donkey's colt, just as Zech. 9:9 had predicted.

Jesus knew that those who would hear him teach at the temple would return to their homes throughout the world and announce the coming of the Messiah.

How Jews and Gentiles benefit each other

Romans 11:28-32

Many of the Jews are now enemies of the Good News. But this has been to your benefit, for God has given his gifts to you Gentiles. Yet the Jews are still his chosen people because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the Jews refused his mercy, God was merciful to you instead.

And now, in the same way, the Jews are the rebels, and God's mercy has come to you. But someday they, too, will share in God's mercy.

For God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone.

In this passage Paul shows how the Jews and the Gentiles benefit each other. Whenever God shows mercy to one group, the other shares the blessing.

In God's original plan, the Jews would be the source of God's blessing to the Gentiles (see Genesis 12:3). When the Jews neglected this mission, God blessed the Gentiles anyway through the Jewish Messiah.

He still maintained his love for the Jews because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ("on account of the patriarchs"). But someday the faithful Jews will share in God's mercy. God's plans will not be thwarted: he will "have mercy on them all."

For a beautiful picture of Jews and Gentiles experiencing rich blessings, see Isaiah 60.

The privileges and invitation of God given to Israel can never be withdrawn.

Why many thought gospel was foolish.

1 Cor. 1:22-23

God's way seems foolish to the Jews because they want a sign from heaven to prove it is true. And it is foolish to the Greeks because they believe only what agrees with their own wisdom.

So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended, and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

In order to answer the accusation that Jesus was only a spirit and not a true human being, Paul explained that Jesus' physical body actually died. Jesus suffered death fully as a human so that we could be assured that he died in our place.

Jesus faced death as God so we can be assured that his sacrifice was complete and that he truly removed our sin.

The way to be free from sin is to trust Jesus Christ to take it away. We must remain "established and firm" in the truth of the gospel, putting our confidence in Jesus alone to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he desires.

When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant not guilty, the person has been acquitted of all the accusations or charges. Legally, it is as if he or she had never been accused.

When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From his perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. God's solution is

available to you. No matter what you have done or what you have been like, God's forgiveness is for you.

Why so many Jews were opposed to Christianity.

1 Thes. 2:17-18

Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again.

We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us.

Satan is real. He is called "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephes. 2:2).

We don't know exactly what hindered Paul from returning to Thessalonica—opposition, illness, travel complications, or a direct attack by Satan—but Satan worked in some way to keep him away.

Many of the difficulties that prevent us from accomplishing God's work can be attributed to Satan (see Ephes. 6:12).

Comprised of first early church leaders.

1 Peter 1:1

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the lands of Pontus Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia.

The apostle Peter wrote this letter to encourage believers who would likely face trials and persecution under Emperor Nero. During most of the first century, Christians were not hunted down and killed throughout the Roman Empire.

They could, however, expect social and economic persecution from three main sources: the Romans, the Jews, and their own families. All would very likely be misunderstood; some would be harassed; a few would be tortured and even put to death.

The legal status of Christians in the Roman Empire was unclear. Many Romans still thought of Christians as members of a Jewish sect, and because the Jewish religion was legal, they considered Christianity legal also—as long as Christians complied with the empire's laws.

However, if Christians refused to worship the emperor or join the army, or if they were involved in civil disturbances (such as the one in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:23ff), they might be punished by the civil authorities.

Many Jews did not appreciate being legally associated with Christians. As the book of Acts frequently records, Jews occasionally harmed Christians physically, drove them out of town, or attempted to turn Roman officials against them. Saul, later the great apostle Paul, was an early Jewish persecutor of Christians.

Another source of persecution was the Christian's own family. Under Roman law, the head of the household had absolute authority over all its members.

Unless the ruling male became a Christian, the wife, children and servants who were believers might well face extreme hardship. If they were sent away, they would have no place to turn but the church; if they were beaten, no court of law would uphold their interests.

Peter may have been writing especially for new Christians and those planning to be baptized. Peter wanted to warn them about what lay ahead, and they needed his encouraging words to help them face opposition.

This letter is still helpful for any Christians facing trials. Many Christians around the world are living under governments more repressive than the Roman Empire of the first century.

Christians everywhere are subject to misunderstanding, ridicule, and even harassment by unbelieving friends, employers, and family members. None of us are exempt from catastrophe, pain, illness, and death—trials that, like persecution, make us lean heavily on God’s grace. For today’s readers, as well as for Peter’s original audience, the theme of this letter is *hope*.

Peter (also called Simon and Cephas) was one of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus (Mark 1:16-18; John 1:42) and, with James and John, was part of the inner group that Jesus singled out for special training and fellowship.

Peter was one of the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, God’s Son, and Jesus gave him a special leadership role in the church (Matthew 16:16-19; Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-19). Although during Jesus’ trial Peter denied knowing Jesus, Peter repented and became a great apostle. For more information on Peter, see his Profile.

This letter is addressed to “God’s elect, strangers in the world,” or to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the world as a result of persecution against believers in and around Jerusalem.

The first believers and leaders of the early church were Jews. When they became Christians, they didn't give up their Jewish heritage, just as you didn't give up your nationality when you became a follower of Christ.

Because of persecution, these believers had been scattered throughout the Roman world (this scattering is described in Acts 8:1-4).

Persecution didn't stop the spread of the gospel; instead, persecution served as a way to introduce the Good News to the whole empire. Thus the churches to which Peter wrote also included Gentile Christians.

Whatever your race or nationality, the gospel of Jesus Christ is for you.

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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