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To the Jew Last

By Daniel Goldberg, The Chosen People Magazine, January 1990.

The entire history of Jewish missions may be summarized in one succinct paragraph: The early Church preached the Gospel to the Jew *first*, the Church of the Middle Ages preached the Gospel to the Jew *last*, and the Church at the end of the Age is preaching the Gospel to the Jew *at last*.

Three times in Romans 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the mandate: "to the Jew first." Romans 2:9 states that judgment upon evildoers will come to the Jew first. Romans 2:10 informs us that peace, glory, and honor will come to everyone who does good, to the Jew first.

But Romans 1:16 states that "the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation" is "to the Jew first." There is therefore an order and a priority in terms of evangelism and outreach. The real meaning of Romans 1:16 is that missions begin with Jewish missions and do not end until every individual — Jew and Gentile — has heard the Good News.

Beginning at Jerusalem

The early Church took Romans 1:16 quite seriously. The parting orders of the Lord before He ascended to heaven are of crucial import: Evangelism was to begin at Jerusalem with the Jewish people, extend to Judea and to Samaria, and then spread to the uttermost part of the earth. The basic reason why the Gospel is to the Jew first is that if the Jewish people hear the Gospel, the Gentiles will surely hear also.

In every age God has used the Jewish people to evangelize the *goyim* (Gentiles), beginning with His calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. Throughout the Old Testament era Jewish prophets and evangelists such as Jonah preached the Word of God to the Gentiles. In fact, it was Israel's unique treasure that the Word of God, that is, the oracles of the Lord, were committed to the Jewish nation.

Whenever Jesus or His apostles entered a city, we find them evangelizing Jewish people at the very onset. The disciples always went first to the synagogue (and when in Jerusalem, to the Temple) to reach their brethren. Paul and Barnabas stated this same principle of priority in Acts 13:46, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you ..."

No Difference Between Jew and Gentile

But some will raise the objection that Paul in Romans 10:12 taught that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. We concede that when it comes to matters of sin and salvation, there is indeed no difference. Both Jews and Gentiles are sinners, and both Gentiles and Jewish people must be saved by faith in Christ, the Jewish Messiah.

But in other areas there seem to be great differences between Jews and Gentiles. There's a difference in

calling, a difference in judgment (Romans 2:9), and a difference in God's future purposes for the nation of Israel.

There's even a difference in satanic hatred, seeing that in Revelation 12, John revealed that the Jewish people are objects of the enmity of Satan. So great are the differences, based on the sovereignty of God, that the Lord told Abraham He would bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel.

Thus the early Church preached the Gospel to the Jew first. They obeyed God's mandate. As time progressed, however, the Gospel went out to the Jew last, the sad consequence of the Church becoming blind toward Israel even as the leaders of Israel had become blind toward their own Messiah.

Our Lord indicated that it was entirely possible for a church to be blind. In Revelation 3:17-18 the Messiah described the Laodicean Church as "wretched, miserable, poor and *blind* and naked," and the Lord then counseled them to buy eye salve and anoint their eyes so that they could see.

Last to the Jew

Throughout the Middle Ages the blindness of the Church toward God's purposes for Israel was evident because the Gospel was preached last to the Jewish people.

It's a strange commentary on the Christianity of Western Europe that the heretical sects were more tolerant of Abraham's children than were the adherents of orthodoxy. Even the Visigoths and Arians required that the privileges of Jews be strictly preserved, whereas the so-called Christian Church continued to violate the rights of Jewish people.

It was often churchmen who fanned the flame of anti-Semitism. Chrysostom, the "golden mouthed" preacher of Medieval times, proclaimed publicly that Christians should not converse with Jews, whose souls were alleged to be the habitation of demons. Thus throughout the Middle Ages, in many distinct ways, it could be said that the Gospel was preached to the Jews last.

Six Methods

The Church of the Middle Ages employed six difference methods through which one could say that the Gospel went out to the Jewish people last. The first was **forced baptism**. Church history is replete with examples of pressuring Jewish people to be baptized in the name of Christ. In fact, baptism itself was the sign of conversion in the Medieval Church. These efforts to compel Jewish acceptance of baptism created social barriers between the Church and the Jewish community, so that when Jewish people refused to be baptized under compulsion, the Church persecuted and sometimes massacred them.

The second method used in the Middle Ages whereby the Gospel went out last to the Jewish people was forced wearing of a **yellow badge**. Pope Innocent III decreed in A.D. 1215 that all Jews must be distinguished from Christians by a yellow badge affixed prominently on the Jews' outermost garment. This, too, made the Jew an object of ridicule and cruel persecution.

The third method was the **Ghetto**. Interestingly enough, Jewish people lived in their own communities in the Middle Ages, so it was really not necessary to force them to live in a separate sector of the city. Nevertheless, in 1555, the Ghetto became the compulsory habitat of Roman Jews, by decree of Pope Paul IV.

In actuality, however, the Ghetto was enforced to keep Church people from entering Jewish homes and seeing the latter's higher standard of living because of family solidarity. The divorce rate among Jews was extremely low. And, because they kept the Old Testament kosher laws, there was a higher sanitation standard and a lower disease rate. Add to this the fact that Jewish people had scrolls or books in their homes because of their keen desire and zeal for learning. Thus, what was actually happening was that churchmen were becoming converted to Judaism by droves in the Middle Ages; to terminate this trend, the Ghetto was enforced.

Yet another method was the **Crusades**. There were about a dozen unsuccessful Crusades. The first one was initiated by Pope Urban II at the Council of Claremont in 1095. The purpose of the Crusades included taking Gentiles from a land-locked feudal system and placing them in a

huge army to march and sail to Jerusalem. Why? To free Jerusalem from the infidels. Keep in mind, however, that Jewish people were out of Jerusalem by A.D. 70 and that they never returned en masse until after 1900 and, of course, at the conception of the State in 1948.

Jerusalem was under the control of the Moslems and Seljuk Turks in the Middle Ages. When en route to Jerusalem the huge-clumsy Crusader armies pillaged Jewish homes and massacred Jews by the thousands. It was not an uncommon sight to observe Jewish mothers throwing their young children from river bridges with millstones tied around their necks lest the Crusaders seize their children. This was the "gospel" presented to Jewish people in the Middle Ages.

When forced baptism, the yellow badges, the Ghetto, and the Crusades were unsuccessful in converting Jews, the Church used **banishment** to preach the "gospel." Banishment began in England in 1290 with King Edward I's decree that there was no more room for Jewish people in England.

So he banished them, after plundering all their property, to unknown and inhospitable shores. They did not return to England until hundreds of years later. France followed suit, issuing edicts in 1306 by Philip IV and finally in 1394 by Charles VI. All Jewish people were driven from the shores of France. The extremity of Jewish agony, however, was reserved for Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella. On March 30, 1492, all Jews were evicted from that country as well.

The last method used in the Middle Ages was the **Inquisition**, implemented by Dominican monks and friars. The Church was never sure if compulsory baptism had actually converted the Jews into Christians, and it feared that they were secretly practicing their Judaism. Hence Jews were stretched on the rack and forced to recant their beliefs. Many were turned over to the state to be executed at the stake.

These were not the only methods used to present the "gospel" to Jewish people last. There were also the mass conversionist sermons. Jewish people were herded into large cathedrals to be preached at by bishops and archbishops. They made a captive audience because if any Jew fell asleep during the sermon, he most surely would be put to death. Thus, baptized or unbaptized, the Jew was the horrible loser.

In all those dark and long centuries, men believed that force was greater than love, sacraments superior to the Savior, and baptism more important than intelligent faith in Christ. Of course, the "gospel" that went out to the Jews in the Middle Ages was not really "good news" at all. It detracted mightily from the love and beauty of the Messiah.

To the Jew at Last

Now at the end of the present age, we discover that the Gospel is reaching the Jewish people *at last*. This is the result of three significant factors.

First the Church is awakening to lost biblical truth. For example, the truth of justification by faith was rediscovered by the major reformers. It was not until many years after the

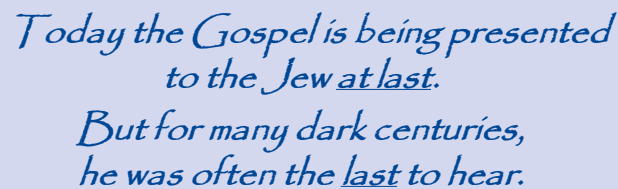
Reformation, however, that the Church began to discover prophetic truth and the place of Israel in the prophetic plan of God. The Church did not begin to take seriously the books of Daniel and Revelation until many years after the Reformation. There is no doubt that the last great lost truth being rediscovered at the end of this age is that there is an order and priority in disseminating the Gospel based on Romans 1:16. At last the Gospel is finally being presented in love to the Jewish people.

Second, more Jewish people are finding their Messiah today than ever before. Now, every single day, Jewish people are discovering and committing their lives to the Savior.

The third significant factor is that more Gentile Christians have become interested in witnessing of Messiah. These Christians are reaching the Jewish people more effectively than ever before. As a result of Jewish people hearing the Gospel today, multitudes of Gentiles will hear the Gospel tomorrow. In fact, Jewish evangelists will circle the globe preaching the Gospel to Gentiles, fulfilling what we read in Revelation 7 of a vast number of Gentiles being saved from every tongue, tribe, kindred, and nation which no man can number.

Thus in every era, from the Old Testament era to the beginning of the Church era and through the future Tribulation period and even during the Millennial kingdom, Jewish people will serve as God's evangelists to the Gentiles. It is therefore incumbent upon the Church today to present the Gospel, in love, to Messiah's kinspeople according to the flesh.

Yes, the early Church preached the Gospel to the Jew first, the Church of the Middle Ages preached the Gospel to the Jew last, and now finally, at the end of the age, the Gospel is being propagated in love to the Jew at last.



*Today the Gospel is being presented
to the Jew at last.
But for many dark centuries,
he was often the last to hear.*