

PAUL'S PRIORITY IN PREACHING

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16)

- Paul, as you know, was set apart from birth to preach to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15, 16).
- On the Road to Damascus Jesus told Paul that He was sending him to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17).
- Ananias, who baptized Paul, was told that he was a chosen vessel to carry God's name to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).
- Paul realized that he was an apostle to the Gentiles and made much of his ministry. He even saw this ministry to the Gentiles as a way to provoke the Jews to jealousy (Rom. 11:13).
- Everywhere Paul preached he consistently preached to the Jews first.
- Why?

Looking at this question with human eyes leads us to consider the Jews like “low hanging fruit” which would be the easiest to harvest for Christ. In a city filled with pagans, the Jews at least believed in the One True God. Under these circumstances, it only makes sense to go to the Jew first.

Looking at this question with spiritual eyes leads us to assume that God was guiding Paul each step of the way. Just as God guided Philip to a deserted road between Jerusalem and Gaza (Acts 8:26), God guided Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:6 – 10). This leads us to assume that since Paul preached first to the Jews he was “led by the Spirit” to do so!

Jesus, Himself, commanded His apostles to go from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but does this mean that the Jews were to come first everywhere?

Paul's priorities are reflected in his letter to Rome. When God originally selected the Sons of Israel they were the “fewest of all peoples” (Deut. 7:7). They remain so unto this day! In Rome their numbers went to zero when the Emperor Claudius forced all Jews to leave (Acts 18:2). Even though some Jews had returned by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, they must have still been a minority. Yet, the Jews play a prominent part in the letter itself. Yes! The Gospel probably came to this great city when “Visitors from Rome” returned from Pentecost with the Gospel (Acts 2:10). No matter how few Jews there were in Rome, however, they play an important part in how the Roman letter was written.

Please consider that the words “Jew” and “Jews” are found 19 times in the letter. Consider also that whole sections of the letter are specifically directed to Jews. Understanding Hebrew history is also an integral part of understanding what Paul was writing. To understand the Gospel you had to know about Habakkuk, circumcision, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, the Law, David, Isaiah, etc. When Paul came to Rome as a prisoner several years later, within three days he called together the leaders of the Jews to speak with them about the “hope of Israel” (Acts 28:17 – 25). When only “some” believed Paul gave them a warning from the prophet Isaiah and turned his focus to the Gentiles (Acts 28:26 – 31).

Perhaps one reason why this “apostle to the Gentiles” devoted such attention to the Jews is that he understood that God isn't done with them yet. They certainly played an essential role in bringing Christ into the world for “from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” (Rom. 9:5). It seems also that the Jews will play an important part in preparing the world for the second coming of Christ. Paul wanted the Romans to understand the “mystery” that this “hardening” has only happened “in part” to Israel “until” the full number of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25). The Gentiles, like wild olive shoots, had been grafted into a Jewish tree (Rom. 11:17 – 21). Paul pointed out how easy it will be for God to graft the natural branches back into their own tree (Rom. 11:22 – 24). Yes! “God's gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). If the transgression of the Jews brought riches for the world, how much greater riches will their fullness bring (Rom. 11:12). As far as the Gospel is concerned they are enemies, but as far as the election is concerned they are loved (Rom. 11:20).

Winston Churchill said it like this: *“Some people like the Jews, and some do not. But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are, beyond any question, the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has appeared in the world”.*