

To the Jew First (Acts 13:46-52)^a

© 2017 Tony Garland^b

Context

1. **Paul and Barnabas visiting the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia on what would later be known as Paul's First Missionary Journey.**
2. **Paul uses the Old Testament, their own highly-revered writings:**
 - A. To demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah.
 - B. To explain the purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. **Finally, he warns them of the dangers of hardening their hearts in unbelief—a warning also given by the Old Testament prophets.**
4. **Despite Paul's warning, the majority of the Jews reject Paul's message.**

Passage (Acts 13:46-52)

1. **Reading from verse 45 for additional context.**

[45] But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. **[46]** Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. **[47]** For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" **[48]** Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. **[49]** And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. **[50]** But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. **[51]** But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. **[52]** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.¹

To the Jew First

1. **“. . . It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first . . .” (Acts 13:46).**
2. **Why did Paul consider it “necessary?”**
3. **Similar to the early ministry of Jesus.**

- A. Puzzling and remarkable statements during the ministry of Jesus.
- B. *These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat. 10:5-6).*
- I. Jesus is making an ethnic distinction in who they are to primarily seek at that time in His ministry.
 - a. NOT Gentiles, NOT Samaritans, ONLY Jews!
 - b. Shocking!!
- C. *And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.” But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw [it] to the little dogs. And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” (Mat. 15:22-27).*
- I. He seems to ignore this Canaanite woman!
 - II. He describes the Jews as “the children”.
 - III. He likens Canaanites as akin to “little dogs!” (Dogs are unclean animals according to OT law.)
 - IV. Shocking!
 - V. The woman understands this distinction, persists, and her daughter is healed.
- D. How are we to understand this?
- I. Context!
 - II. Jesus is in the process of presenting Himself to Israel as their promised King and Messiah.
 - III. Subsequently, they will reject Him as King and the exclusively-Jewish focus will shift.
 - a. . . . *they cried out, “Away with [Him], away with [Him]! Crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15)*

E. QUESTION: does a priority in Jewish evangelism remain beyond the rejection of Jesus by His own?

4. Jewish evangelistic priority after the cross.

A. Jesus instructions before His ascension

I. *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

- a. #1 Jerusalem (center of Judaism and all things Jewish)
- b. #2 Judea and Samaria (Samaritans who had mixed with the Jews)
- c. #3 End of the earth (the Gentile nations worldwide)

II. Why beginning at Jerusalem?

B. Peter's first evangelistic sermon on the Day of Pentecost

I. *"You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one [of you] from your iniquities" (Acts 3:25-26).*

II. Abrahamic Covenant has two primary aspects

- a. God makes blessings and promises to Abraham's physical line — the Jews.
- b. God blesses all the nations (including Gentiles) through the Messiah who comes forth from Abraham's physical line.
- c. The promises to Abraham—and the people who sprung forth from his loins —form the root out of which the other blessings flow.

C. Paul - at Antioch of Pisidia, starts at the synagogue

I. After the Great Commission:

- a. Matthew - *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19).*
- b. Mark - *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).*
- c. Luke - *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that*

repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

- i. Here we see a hint of the Jewish priority within the larger context of global evangelism: *beginning at Jerusalem*.
- ii. But the gospel had already been preached "beginning at Jerusalem" on the Day of Pentecost—more than 10 years earlier.

II. After Paul is commissioned to go to the Gentiles:

- a. *But the Lord said to [Ananias], "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15).
 - i. Implied order: 1) Gentiles; 2) their leaders; 3) children of Israel.
- b. Jesus directly informed Paul that his missionary focus was to include Gentiles
 - i. *I will deliver you from the [Jewish] people, as well as [from] the Gentiles, to whom I now send you* (Acts 26:17).

D. "Stuck on synagogues!"

I. Iconium - the very next chapter after Paul gives up on the Jews of Antioch Pisidia

- a. Paul's first stop is the synagogue (Acts 14:1)!
- b. *Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed* (Acts 14:1).
- c. What gives? I thought Paul had turned to the Gentiles?
- d. Hint: the statement is not meant globally or categorically, but *locally*.

II. Thessalonica - "as his custom was," Paul's first stop is the synagogue (Acts 17:1)

- a. *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews* (Acts 17:1).

III. Berea - first stop is the synagogue (Acts 17:10)

- a. There was such Jewish opposition in Thessalonica that Paul and Silas had to sneak out under cover of darkness.
- b. What do they do when they reach the next town, Berea?
 - i. *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews* (Acts 17:10)

IV. Corinth - first place he taught was the synagogue (Acts 18:1-4)

- a. *After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. . . . And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:1-4).*

V. Ephesus - first stop is the synagogue (Acts 18:19)

- a. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. (Acts 18:19)

VI. Ephesus again - after traveling various places, upon returning to Ephesus, Paul heads straight for the synagogue (Acts 19:8)

- a. *And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).*

VII. Rome - When Paul arrives at Rome, he calls for the leaders of the Jews so as to present the gospel to them (Acts 28:16-17)

5. Is Jewish priority forfeited beyond Acts?

A. Paul's declaration to Jews of Rome which closes out the book of Acts

- I. Therefore let it be known to you [Jews] that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it! (Acts 28:28)

B. That's it: the priority of Jewish evangelism has been given up, *forfeited due to unbelief* . . . or has it?

Today evangelism of the world must include the Jews, but the priority of the Jews has been fulfilled. [J.A. Witmer]²

To claim that the gospel must be preached first to the Jew throughout this dispensation, is utterly to deny God's Word that there is now no distinction between Jew and Greek either as to the fact of sin (Rom. 3:22) or the availability of salvation (Rom. 10:12). Paul's words in Gal. 4:12 are wholly meaningless if the Jews still have a special place.³

C. What if Acts had only 13 chapters — we might reach the same conclusion. Paul makes a declaration which sounds virtually identical with the one which closes out Acts:

- I. *Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles". (Acts 13:46).*

II. Yet, in the very next town, he goes to the synagogue first!

III. Similarly, while at Corinth in Acts 18 there is such opposition from the Jews that Paul makes a similar statement:

a. . . . *Your blood [be] upon your [own] heads; I [am] clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.* (Acts 18:6).

IV. Yet, later in Acts, Paul is back focusing on synagogues and the Jews of Ephesus and Rome.

D. What is going on?

I. Similar statements are made three times within the book of Acts (Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:25-28).

II. Paul's turning to the Gentiles only occurs after the Jews in a local region have heard the message and hardened their hearts.

III. These are not global, categorical statements that Jewish evangelism has permanently lost its emphasis.⁵

IV. Throughout all three of Paul's missionary journeys

a. Throughout the book of Acts—all the way to its close, in A.D. 57-58, Paul continues this emphasis *to the Jew first*.

b. That would be a quarter of a century beyond the Day of Pentecost, the “beginning at Jerusalem” (Acts 1:8), and far afield from Judea.

c. Not just an initial, regional priority - WHY?

Why a continued Jewish priority?

1. Paul's understanding

A. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek* (Rom. 1:16)

I. First in preeminence based on covenant relationship

a. *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom [pertain] the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service [of God], and the promises; of whom [are] the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ [came], who is over all, [the] eternally blessed God. Amen* (Rom. 9:3-5).

i. The Jews played the central role in plan of God leading up to the New Testament

■ The adoption - as a special nation, chosen for God's purposes.

- The glory - God's localized manifestation was in their midst.
- The giving of the law - not just the Ten Commandments, but the Bible.
- The service of God - via the tabernacle and temple wherein He dwelt in their midst.
- The promises - various covenants.
- The fathers - the individuals to whom the promises and covenants were made.
- Christ - Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a Jewess.

b. John Calvin

nor does he thrust the Jews from their own eminence and dignity, since they were the first partakers of God's promise and calling. He then reserves for them their prerogative;⁶

c. Albert Barnes

Not that the gospel was any more adapted to Jews than to others; but to them had been committed the oracles of God; the Messiah had come through them; they had had the law, the temple, and the service of God, and it was natural that the gospel should be proclaimed to them before it was to the Gentiles.⁷

d. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

e. If the means of salvation has its origin within a chosen ethnic group, then why wouldn't God have a great desire to see that same ethnic group benefit from that which He initially entrusted to their care?

B. Concerning the righteous judgment of God

I. Romans 2:5-11

. . . who “will render to each one according to his deeds” : eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.⁸

II. Not a matter of preference, *there is no partiality with God*

III. First in need, first in judgment

a. Adam Clarke

To the Jew first - Not only the Jews have the first offer of this Gospel, but they have the greatest need of it; being so deeply fallen, and having sinned against such glorious privileges, they are much more culpable than the Gentiles, who never had the light of a Divine revelation.⁹

- b. Here we see the flip side of the glory of having been powerfully used by God.
 - i. As Jesus explained, . . . *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more* (Luke 12:48).
 - ii. Much had been given to the Jews.
 - iii. Of all people, they *should* have been better prepared to respond to Jesus, their Messiah.
 - iv. Having the greater revelation, Jews who reject will also bear greater responsibility.

2. Jewish Aspects of the Second Coming

A. What was Jesus doing in the narrowed focus upon Israel at His First Coming?

- I. Making a good-faith offer of the promised kingdom.
- II. In crucifying their King, the kingdom was delayed.
- III. The disciples understood this to be the case, even after the crucifixion and resurrection of the King.
 - a. Their expectation, . . . *Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* (Acts 1:6)
 - b. Jesus' response, . . . *It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority* (Acts 1:7).

B. What can we conclude: there is unfinished business concerning the kingdom in relation to Israel.

C. Jewish evangelism remains a priority

- I. Jesus hinted that the evangelism of the Jews will be an ongoing task which continues throughout this age.
 - a. *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes* (Mat. 10:23).
 - i. From τελέω [teleō], “bring to an end, finish, complete”¹⁰
 - ii. You will “by no means finish” the cities.

- Double negative, emphasis, **οὐ μὴ** [*ou mē*]
- “gone through” is implied

II. God's time-table includes the future conversion of the Jews.

a. Partial, temporary blindness

. . . blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;”¹¹

- b. Valley of the Dead Bones, Ezekiel **37**, *For if their being cast away [is] the reconciling of the world, what [will] their acceptance [be] but life from the dead?* (Rom. **11:15**)

D. Is there a Jewish element critical to His Second Coming?

I. A Jewish precondition for the return of Jesus?

a. Jesus Himself set the precondition

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under [her] wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed [is] He who comes in the name of the LORD!'¹²

- b. Figure of speech: Jerusalem is put for the Jewish people living therein.
- c. Blessed [is] He who comes - the very thing the crowds had proclaimed when He presented Himself as king riding in on the foal of a donkey fulfilling the prediction of Zec. **9:9**, as recorded in Matthew **21:9**.
- i. . . . *Behold, your King is coming to you; He [is] just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey* (Zec. **9:9**).h w
- d. Until Jews living in Jerusalem call for His return, the earth will not see Him again. Period.
- e. So just how important is Jewish evangelism, anyway?!

II. Jewish aspects of Revelation

- a. This also explains the Jewish aspects of the Book of Revelation which so many are puzzled by or refuse to accept at face value.
- i. 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Rev. **7**; **14**).
- ii. A rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Rev. **11**).

- iii. Two Jewish prophets who minister in Jerusalem (Rev. 11).
 - iv. A large number of those in Jerusalem, presumably Jews, come to faith (Rev. 11:13).
- b. These Jewish aspects are also mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24 concerning the same time period to come.
- i. The sign of the “abomination of desolation” which appears to occur at the midpoint of the tribulation (Mat. 24:15)
 - Those in *Judea* are to flee, as recorded in Revelation 12 (Rev. 12:6,14).
 - Pray that it not be on the Sabbath (Mat. 24:20).
 - ii. A unique and very dangerous time for the Jews which Jeremiah referred to as *the time of Jacob's trouble* (Jer. 30:7).
- III. God has unfinished business with the Jews, to rectify the disastrous result of the rejection of her Messiah at His first coming.

Summary

1. The Church must continue with the daunting task and unfinished business of evangelizing the Jews which entails numerous challenges:

- A. Almost half of today's Jews have rejected faith in any form: embracing secularism or atheism.¹³
- B. The majority of religious Jews associate themselves with Judaism, which denies the concept of original sin and embraces the notion of works-based salvation.
- C. Since the Bible is considered to be “their book,” we have the unenviable task of trying to convince them Christians understand it better than they do.
- D. Then there's the “Shoah” [destruction] or Holocaust:
 - I. How could there possibly be an all-powerful good God if the Holocaust was allowed to happen?
 - II. How could He possibly be the God of Israel, the God of the Jews?
- E. Apart from God's Holy Spirit, how could we possibly reach them on behalf of their own Messiah?

2. The Jews have stumbled, but have not fallen . . . they are down, but not out

- A. *I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation [has come] to the Gentiles. Now if their fall [is] riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! (Rom. 11:11-12)*



SpiritAndTruth.org Scan Code^c

Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 13:46-52](#)
2. [Ref-0038, 2:441](#)
3. [RVBV, Rom. 1:16](#)
4. [Ref-1217, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, 103-104](#)
5. "Although the Scriptures are very clear about this procedure, it is nevertheless denied by many. A major argument used to refute this doctrine is based on Acts [28:25-28](#). Because of these concluding words and Paul's declaration that the gospel will now go to the Gentiles, the passage is taken to mean that the gospel is no longer to the Jew first and that God has now changed His program of evangelism, superseding Rom. [1:16](#), which was written before the Book of Acts. . . . The true meaning is to be found by comparing this passage with two other passages where these words had been spoken before: Acts [13:44-48](#) and Acts [18:5-6](#). The true interpretation of Acts [28:25-28](#) is to be seen in these two passages, which indicate a local change and not an overall change in the program of evangelism. . . . There is no shift in the procedure of presenting the gospel. Acts [28](#) is only a continuation of a procedure already in progress of presenting the gospel to the Jews first and then turning to the Gentiles."⁴
6. [Ref-0696, Rom. 1:16](#)
7. [Ref-0974, Rom. 1:16](#)
8. [NKJV, Romans 2:5-11](#)
9. [Ref-1330, Rom. 1:16](#)
10. [Ref-0334, 810](#)
11. [NKJV, Rom. 11:25-26](#)
12. [NKJV, Matthew 23:37-39](#)
13. "According to opinion polls, half of all Israeli Jews consider themselves secular." — [Demographics of Judaism^d](#)

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- RVBV** William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0334** See . Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996, c1979). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature : A translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schrift en des Neuen Testaments und der ubrigen urchristlichen Literatur. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ref-0696** J. Calvin *Calvin's Commentaries* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).
- Ref-0974** Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (n.p.: Word Search Corporation, 2007).
- Ref-1217** Christopher Cone, ed., *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Authority*, 1st ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009). ISBN:[978-0-9814791-5-6^e](#).
- Ref-1330** Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (n.p.: n.p., 1826).

Links Mentioned Above

a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/45_Acts_13_46-52/index.htm.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

d - See <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-judaism>.

e - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-9814791-5-6>.