

Jewish Roots, Global Gospel

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[0 : 00] Just to say that tonight's sermon might be slightly longer, but don't blame me, because Paul had a long sermon. So it's good that you are all talking about your traditions, and I'm sure that you are all so familiar with Christmas traditions.

But with those, I wonder whether you realize where they come from. So take the Christmas tree. You might think it's as old as the birth of Jesus itself.

But the practice actually began among the Germans in the 16th century. It may explain the conical shape of the trees, because that's the kind of trees that you have in Germany.

It was said that Martin Luther put candles onto his tree. They didn't have electricity at the time, so candles.

And just think about it. A bit of a fire hazard. Then of course there's Santa Claus. The origins of this non-biblical imposter.

[1 : 08] Go back to St. Nicholas, actually. The 4th century Greek bishop. But the jolly bearded figure in red, a picture on the slide there. And, you know, if you compare that to a 13th century depiction of St. Nick.

Well, that Santa Claus stemmed from the late 1700s. But of course, over the years, his girth got ever wider and wider.

But before, some of you might know this, in the 1930s, he really just took off. Not on his sleigh, but just took off in popularity.

Any guesses why? Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola, that's right. Who said that? Daniel. Daniel Broadbridge. Yep. Coca-Cola exploited the red and white colors for their own marketing purposes.

Apparently, Pepsi did as well. But, you know, they had blue, so I'm not sure how that worked. Well, that's the way with many things, isn't it, in history? With time, we often lose track of the origin of a tradition.

[2 : 19] And, you know, the same could be said of Christianity. Many churches today, if they open the Bible, tend to focus in the New Testament. Perhaps even the Gospels only.

With the Old Testament, they may recall a verse here and there. Perhaps you've gone to Qurong and you bought an inspirational poster to put on your wall. You know, the Old Testament, one verse on it.

Or perhaps your office laptop, wallpaper, might have a one-line verse from the Old Testament. I wonder what your favorite is. Lamentations, chapter 3, verse 23.

Psalms 23, verse 1, the Lord's my shepherd. Someone this morning said, Psalm 46, verse 10. Be still and know that I am Lord. Particularly for the office.

He was being serious. So, I think for a lot of people, Christians in particular, large parts of the Old Testament actually remain unknown to them.

[3 : 26] What Paul helps us to realize today as we look at this sermon is just how much, though, that the Gospel itself is rooted in the Old Testament. Now, of course, you here at HD, you've not had that problem.

You know, some of you have been doing God's big picture. So, just looking at the whole Bible and how that fits in together and points to Jesus. You've just done Leviticus, so you know that back to front.

So, no problems with the Old Testament. But Paul today is trying to point us back to the very Old Testament roots, the Jewish origins of the Gospel itself.

Now, before we get into the sermon, let's just get our bearings as to where Paul and Barnabas are. So, we skip reading that first few verses, but in verse 13 of chapter 18, we find that they've just left Cyprus and returned to the mainland.

So, if you look, just skip over the verses, look at the map, which is on your page, but also on the slide. You will see that where they've ended up is Pisidian Antioch. Now, this is another Antioch, not the same one that they've come from, which is Antioch in Syria, down to the east.

[4 : 32] But as is their usual practice, as they turn up at a city, they first begin their ministry at a local synagogue. And in this case, after reading from the law and the prophets, the leaders of that synagogue invite them to speak.

So, verse 16, Paul stands up and says, Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me. So, the first point to notice is Paul's intended audience.

Both here and later in verse 26, Paul addresses not just his fellow Israelites or Jews, but God-fearing Gentiles.

That is, Gentiles that worship God, the Jewish God in the synagogue. What Paul is doing, therefore, is bringing the one and same message to both groups.

There isn't one gospel for the Jews and then another for the Gentiles. Rather, all of them needed to hear the one way back to God. But, of course, what Paul now reveals to both Jew and Gentile in his sermon is that the gospel has its roots in the Old Testament, Jewish origins.

[5 : 45] And even the Gentiles would profit from hearing this. So, Paul continues on the next slide. The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors.

He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt. With mighty power, he led them out of that country. For about 40 years, he endured their conduct in the wilderness. And he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance.

All this took about 450 years. And so, in recounting their history, Paul is reminding them God has chosen Israel. Then, who were just a nation or 12 tribes enslaved in Egypt, and brought them to the land of Canaan to prosper them, to make them a nation there, overthrowing other nations around them.

This was God's promise to them. He had chosen them. And then, afterwards, having done that, Paul now moves on to God's promise to them for a king.

Verse 20. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel, the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for years.

[7 : 01] After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him, I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.

From this man's descendants, God has brought to Israel the Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

As John was completing his work, he said, Who do you suppose I am? I'm not the one you're looking for, but there is one coming after me whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. And so, in both of these sections, we actually see a pattern occurring and developing.

First, we see that on both occasions, God is actually the one who initiates. He's the one that saves and chooses and provides for Israel. So, in verse 17, he chose Israel and brought them out and rescued them from slavery.

Brought them out of Egypt. Then, in verse 20, God gives them judges to rule over them, but this was a provision for their good. However, despite this, in both cases, the people then let God down.

[8 : 16] So, verse 21, they asked for a king as a sign of their rejection of God as their king. Back in verse 18, Israel had wandered in the wilderness, and Paul described God as enduring their conduct.

In other words, Paul was saying that actually, the people were a pain in the neck for God. And yet, God continued to be gracious to them. Again, in both cases, after 40 years, he brought them blessing.

So, first, after wandering 40 years in the desert, God brought them to Canaan. And then, in the case of Saul, after his reign of 40 years, which is considered somewhat of a disaster, God gives to them a new king, David, whom God describes as a man after his own heart.

And then, it's from this man that ultimately, the King of Israel, the Messiah, Jesus, comes. But again, before Jesus comes, there is a time of repentance, or call for repentance.

John was sent as a prophet to preach repentance and baptism. So, what we're seeing throughout Israel's history, really, is a pattern, firstly, of God's continued faithfulness, side by side with a warning and evidence of Israel's propensity to reject God's rule.

[9 : 43] And so, for each generation, Israel showed themselves to be a people in dire need of salvation. They can't get it right. And of course, now that the Gentiles are present as well, this was also a warning to them that they were likewise thrown to the same thing.

And sadly, we see this pattern continue with the recent events in Jerusalem, which now Paul reveals to them, verse 26.

Fellow children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.

Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

So here's the irony, really, that Paul is pointing out. That here they were in Jerusalem, as well as right here, where Paul was in Pisidian Antioch, they have been reading the law and the prophets every Sabbath.

[10 : 59] And so they should have recognized Jesus when he came, because the law and the prophets pointed to Jesus. And yet, despite of that, and despite of John's own preaching and warning, they didn't.

But the irony of that is this, that even though they didn't recognize Jesus, even though they disobeyed God, yet they still ended up doing to Jesus everything that was written in the prophets. So they've been reading the prophets every Sabbath, they didn't get it, and yet by disobeying God, they did exactly what the prophets were writing about, over them, isn't it?

But the point of Paul's sermon is really this, that we mustn't think that any of the things that have happened to Jesus has taken God by surprise.

No, this was part of God's plan all along. Verse 30, God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem.

[12 : 10] They are now his witnesses to our people. Again and again, Paul is saying everything that's happening is happening according to what God had decided and planned.

even the fact that Jesus was seen by witnesses, including the apostles, was part of God's plan because they were intended to become credible witnesses to the resurrection, and some of whom eventually wrote the Gospels so that we too, to this very day, have a witness to Jesus' resurrection. So to the Jews, this was meant to be the Messiah they had been waiting for. They should have received him with open arms. But they didn't, of course.

But verse 32, Paul goes on, we tell you the good news, what God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. Do you get the point?

That this is part of God's plan. He had promised it from the very start and now he's fulfilling it for us by raising up Jesus. Jesus. We're all a bit impatient, aren't we, as people?

[13 : 22] Even as Christians, we pray and we expect God to answer immediately, right? Well, maybe not immediately, but, you know, next week, right?

Any longer than that and we think, why is God not answering me? Now, of course, God could answer you, but that's not how he often works, is he? And we see that right here because what Paul says is that God had promised our ancestors many, many, many, many generations before and he's only now fulfilled it for us, their children, many, many, many generations later.

God can make you a promise, but it may take many, many, many, many years before he answers and that's up to him, isn't it? In fact, God does make promises across multiple generations across the Old Testament, doesn't he?

First to Abraham, then to David, and then those in exile and each time he reinforces the older promises with new ones, a bit like how you see a rich painting that with each brushstroke being a promise, the painting becomes more vivid and clear so that when Jesus finally comes, it's meant to immediately bring all of God's promises into sharp focus so that the Jews were meant to be saying, aha, yes, Jesus is the one because of all the promises that have built up over time.

And so what Paul does now is actually demonstrates the same thing by giving a few promises from the Old Testament concerning Jesus' resurrection. So verse 33, as it is written in the second Psalm, you are my son, today I have become your father.

[15 : 10] and that's a promise made about the Messiah. God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decaying. That's the first promise. Secondly, as God has said, I will give you

the holy and sure blessings promise to David.

Now this promise, as was read earlier, is from Isaiah chapter 55. And then thirdly, we go on, so it is also stated elsewhere, you will not let your holy one see decaying.

And this last promise, that's from Psalm 16. So all in all, we have three promises over three very different periods in three different parts of the Old Testament across a long period of time, but all of it pointing to the one same thing, isn't it?

And notice, these promises are not primarily made to us first and foremost. Did you get that? It wasn't even given to David.

But rather, these promises are given to his promised Messiah, namely Jesus. It's almost as though we are sort of reading and listening in on God's promises made to his Messiah, and then as we see God raise Jesus from the dead, we see him fulfilling his promises to Jesus, his son, out of which we benefit from God's faithfulness to him.

[16:35] But again, what Paul is trying to reinforce is that none of these events are part of God's plan B. Because the promise of Psalm 16, as Paul now says in verse 36, was never meant for David, was never meant to be fulfilled at the time, but it was given a long time ago so that it might be fulfilled when the Messiah arrives.

All of which shows that the resurrection of the Messiah was part and parcel of God's purposes. Thus, we read, when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. He was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. So it can't be about David. It can't be about David. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. So Psalm 16 was never meant for David, even though it was David who wrote it.

Rather, it was meant for the Messiah. And God even affirms this in Isaiah 55 because he says that the promises made notionally to David are intended for the coming Messiah because he says, I will give to you the sure blessings promised to David.

And he was referring to the Messiah when he said that in Isaiah 55. So in fact, all of the promises that are made to David in Scripture find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

[17:58] And further, although Paul doesn't say it here, every other promise made in the Old Testament to Israel also find their fulfillment in Jesus.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians, everything finds their yes in him. Now what Paul is doing here is really to bring two crucial pieces of corroborating evidences together, two independent sources, so that we might have confidence in the resurrection of Jesus.

And that's how it works, isn't it? Because, for example, if you hear from a friend something a bit far-fetched, you know, naturally you just get a bit suspicious at first, wouldn't you?

But then if another friend who doesn't know your first friend tells you the same thing, then you begin to go, maybe there's some truth in what they're saying, isn't it? Because they kind of colluded but they're independent sources and yet they're saying the same thing has got to be true.

Well, this is what Paul is showing, that the Old Testament prophecies have now been fulfilled in the Messiah and this is independently corroborated by the eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection.

[19:14] One was written many, many, many years ago over a long period of time, so it couldn't be made up on the spot, and the other one were witnesses of the very event itself.

And these two things working together has a more powerful impact, don't you think, than if God had just simply raised Jesus from the dead and said, this is why I did it after the fact, right?

Instead, God promised a long time before to demonstrate that he had ordained all this, and then he fulfills it, so that we understand that the fulfillment is response to the promise.

It's not an afterthought. And so with this assurance, Bogdan explains the significance of what's happening, verse 38. He says, Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus and his resurrection, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. So again, this is what we have, the good news, the gospel about Jesus, that because Jesus rose from the dead, we have forgiveness of sin.

[20:33] The penalty has been paid once for all by Jesus. Something Paul now says to the Jews, the law of Moses could not achieve, because that was never the aim of the law. It was merely to point the way to Jesus.

So everyone who believes now is set free from sin. And that, my friends, includes us as well. So if you're here today and you have not put your faith in Jesus, then Paul's advice and plea to you is the

same.

Come, believe, and be set free from sin. Now that's the promise, that's the good news, but of course, there is also the flip side, that God also wants to warn us in Scripture.

again, beforehand, what happens if we reject his word? And so Paul now warns them, take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you.

Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I'm going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you. Again, this is what the prophets have already said.

[21 : 41] Don't scoff, because you might wonder, and then perish. And then I'm going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.

Well, Paul is now telling them, isn't you? So here's the warning for them. Now, healthy skepticism isn't a bad thing, I don't think, particularly nowadays where there are so many scams.

I'm sure just on Friday, you all got that message, that SMS purportedly from Andrew. We all knew that was a scam, right? Who got that text message? No one?

Yes? Well, I knew it was a scam straightaway, because I was on the phone with Andrew when the text came through. Hi, Mark, this is Andrew, I can't talk to you right now.

You're just talking to the... So healthy skepticism is not a bad thing, right? Because it helps us sort truth from fiction. Scammers from the real Andrew Price, right?

[22 : 41] But skepticism is never meant to then force us to deny that miracles can happen. It's just meant to give us that, you know, antenna so that we're not too easily deceived.

But when a true miracle does happen, and it can happen, it ought to make us believe. And in the case of Jesus' resurrection, God did do a miracle.

And he did the opposite of what the scammers did, right? He gave us credible evidence from two independent sources. And so when he's done that, the warning for us is not to scoff at God's grace, but to consider the evidence carefully instead of just dismissing it.

All right, so that's the end of the sermon from Paul. Not quite the end from me just yet. But what happens at the end of our passage is that we're given a survey of the contrasting reactions to Paul's sermon.

Again, it sets out the pattern for what would occur in Acts and generally in our own lives as well. So at first, verse 42, there are listeners who react with curiosity.

[23 : 58] So they go, as Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things. On the next Sabbath, when the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas.

So here are Jews and Gentiles who talked with them and urged them to continue. Sorry, Paul and Barnabas then talked to these Jews and Gentiles and urged them to continue in the grace of God. So it seems that some did believe. I imagine what happened was that Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue as they were walking home. All these people started following them and asking them questions along the road and that's when Paul and Barnabas said, look, continue in the grace of God and I'll come back next week and we'll talk.

But then, as we saw with Illamas last week, powerful, vested interests are threatened. Same pattern. On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They begin to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

[25 : 11] You see, when the Jews saw that their influence and power were being threatened, the pride and self-interest in them sparked a reaction. But Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly. We had to speak the word of God to you first.

Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us. I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord. And all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Now, I don't think Paul was surprised by the reaction of the Jews because in Jerusalem and in other places before this, he had already seen the opposition to the gospel.

But Paul knew that God had made promises to Israel. The Lord had commanded us, I will make you a light for the Gentiles. That is, I will make Israel, the restored tribes, the restored tribes of Israel, to be a light for the nations.

So Paul knew that he needed to first give the Jews a hearing. It was only fair to them. But by rejecting God's word, Paul now turns to the Gentiles.

[26 : 27] He hasn't totally abandoned them because as we see later on, everywhere he goes, he still goes into the synagogue first. But what he's saying is that he will not allow the rejection by some Jews to stop him from going to the Gentiles because God has chosen Israel, and Paul was an Israelite, to be a light to the Gentiles.

And if you remember God's promise in Isaiah 55 as well, which was read earlier, God had promised to give the Messiah, Jesus, the sure blessings promised to David.

Well, as we read the very next verse later, 4 and 5, one of the sure blessings is that the people will be summoned, the people of all nations will be summoned to the Messiah.

We see that on the next slide. And indeed, for them to run to him and find eternal life. And so, God's promise to Israel is really to benefit all people across the world.

Yes, Jesus is a Jewish Messiah, the King of Israel, but God's aim is that he would be a universal Savior, ruler of all the nations.

[27 : 38] And so, again, us Gentiles, we're not an afterthought in God's plans. It's not as though God preached to the Jews, they rejected him, and therefore God says, I need to find other people to believe in me, let me turn to the Gentiles.

No, we were part of God's plan A from the very beginning. And if you think about it, the church today is actually the most multicultural institution in the whole world, because people from nearly every nation have come to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Isn't that amazing? I think we're doing even better than the United Nations, really, because there are a few nations that are not admitted as members into the United Nations, whereas in God's kingdom, people from every nation without exception are accepted.

But at the same time, even though the church is now truly universal, we as Christians mustn't forget that its roots are in the Old Testament, that our Messiah, Jesus, he's Jewish, and that the promises that God fulfilled to bring us salvation were promises that were made to Israel.

But we can take great comfort that even as God has made these promises to bless Israel, he had us, Gentiles, who live at the ends of the earth in mind when he promised to bless Israel.

[29 : 06] So that's really the first implication, but the second implication from today's events is to realize that God has redrawn the dividing lines of humanity. And we notice this in the reaction of the different groups in this last few verses.

For it reads, the word of the Lord spread through the whole region, but the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women, so these are God-fearing Gentiles of high standing, and the leading men, again Gentiles, of the city, they stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region.

So Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples, and remember back earlier, they were Jews and converts to Judaism, so Jews and Gentiles, and the Gentiles as well, in verse 48, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

So if you look on the next slide, we see clearly in the Old Testament that before Christ came, the promises of God to Israel and the law separated Israel from the Gentiles.

Israel was God's people in covenant relationship with him. The Gentiles were not. But now, as the Lord Jesus has come and word of him has spread, there is now a different dividing line that begins to emerge in the passage today.

[30 : 31] Jews and Gentiles both were involved in inciting persecution to Paul and Barnabas. But likewise, there were Jews and Gentiles who also believed the gospel.

So if you look on the next slide, what we read in verse 48 was when the Gentiles heard, they were glad, weren't they? They were glad in all, meaning both Jews and Gentiles who were appointed for eternal life, believed.

And so, if you look at the next slide, all those who believe now are part of what comes after the coming of Christ.

So the dividing line is no longer the vertical line, but the horizontal line. But the fact is, there is still a dividing line, isn't it?

That those who reject God's word, whether they be Jew or Gentile, verse 46, they forfeit eternal life, don't they? But those who are appointed to eternal life believe whether they are Jew or Gentile.

[31 : 45] And so that's still our challenge today, isn't it? How will we respond when we hear God's word? Do we reject God's word and count ourselves unworthy of eternal life?

Or do we believe the word and therefore prove God's appointment of us to eternal life? And of course, when we go out and share the gospel with others as well, we want to keep praying, don't we, that as we do, those who are appointed to eternal life will believe whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your sure blessings promise to Israel and to David that is now fulfilled in Jesus and therefore fulfilled for our benefit as well.

Thank you that through him we are set free from sin by believing. And Father, as we go out into the world with your gospel, please help those who hear it not to reject it and count themselves unworthy of eternal life.

Instead, please draw all those who you have appointed to eternal life to faith in Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.