

The Gentile Exceptions

Introduction

The British journalist William Ewer wrote the epigram: "How odd / Of God / To choose / The Jews." The Jewish writer, Leo Rosten, waggishly rejoined: "Not odd / Of God / Goyim / Annoy 'im." From a Biblical perspective, Rosten's riposte succinctly summed the first 2,000 years of human history. During that period, God dealt directly with all mankind (Gentiles). This relationship ended badly. God destroyed the world with the Flood and afterward confused language—to preserve the human race. In 2,000 B.C., God initiated an entirely new plan. He called Abram (Abraham) from Ur of the Chaldees (אֲבְרָם בֶּרֶךְ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָנוּ, Genesis 11.28, 31, 15.7; Nehemiah 9.7) and made a covenant with him: the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12.1-3). That covenant laid the foundation for all the covenants God made with the Jews (Palestinian, Mosaic, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New). By means of it God created the Jewish people, the Hebrews, Israel. The covenant decreed God would bless Abraham and his offspring, the line of Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 17.20-22), and that through this line He would bless Gentiles. Therefore, in Genesis 12, a massive change of program began. From this time forward, ALL of God's blessings to Gentiles would be mediated through Jews. Put another way, NO divine blessing was possible apart from Israel.

The Biblical record reveals that most Jews rejected the God of Abraham with respect to personal salvation. Nationally, Israel was God's covenant people but individually, few knew Him. Most Jews worshiped idols and merely went through the obligations of the Mosaic law. Jewish history is the story of God's ongoing attempts to bring the nation to Himself. When they obeyed, He blessed them. When they disobeyed, He disciplined them (primarily by letting Gentile powers defeat them). Their chief failure was idolatry—worshiping other gods. A representative example is Elijah's statement to God following

his victorious experience on Mount Carmel in which he faced 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah. Baal and Asherah were pagan deities whom the majority in Israel worshiped. This ratio of prophets—850:1 indicates how far the nation had fallen. Elijah, alone, proved God was the one true God (1 Kings 18.17-40). In spiritual matters, the majority is always wrong. Elijah believed he was alone:

¹⁴ Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ The Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; ¹⁶ and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19.14-18).

Even though Elijah won his confrontation with the false prophets, the victory was emotionally exhausting. In response, God revealed to Elijah that 7,000 believed in Him. But this was a tiny minority. The population of Israel at that time was about 7,000,000. This meant Israel's believing population was $\frac{1}{100}$ of 1 percent (.1%). In terms of today's population, that would be 7.4 million Christians worldwide. For the United States it would mean 300,000 Christians. These are tiny minorities. But this should not surprise us. Jesus Himself said:

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7.13-14).

This is a sobering verse. “Few” ([ὀλίγος](#)) find salvation.

Paul commented on Elijah in Romans 11:

¹ I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ “Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.

Paul’s point was that God always preserves a remnant. Earlier, in Romans 9 he wrote:

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “through Isaac your descendants will be named.” ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Merely being a Jew did not constitute salvation. To be a “child of God,” a “child of promise,” i.e., “true Israel,” required faith as well as keeping the Mosaic Law.

Gentile Exceptions

Few Jews knew God. Even fewer Gentiles knew Him. But God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3.9) and “desires all to be saved” (1 Timothy 2.4). Salvation is available to anyone who wants it even though the Abrahamic Covenant gave favor to the Jews. But within this favor, Gentiles obtained salvation. Who were they?

Jethro

Jethro was Moses’ father-in-law (Exodus 18.1). He was a Kenite and priest of Midian but responded positively to Israel (Exodus 3.1; 18.9-12; Judges 1.16). He was also known as Reuel (רְעוּל, Exodus 2.18) and his name means “friend of God.” He exercised faith with his recognition that the God of Moses was the one true God and demonstrated this faith in offering sacrifices to God. While God had not yet given the Law, animal sacrifices were known and practiced by men as the acceptable way to approach God as early as Cain and Able (Genesis 4.3-5, 22.7-8 cf. Genesis 31.54; Exodus 3.18, 5.3, 8.8, 25). God Himself instituted blood sacrifice as the means of approach for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3.21). The following passage recorded Jethro’s salvation:

⁹ Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ So Jethro said, “Blessed be the Lord who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.” ¹² Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-

law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God (Exodus 18.9-12).

Rahab

God had brought Israel into Egypt in the days of Joseph and his father Jacob by means of a famine in the land of Canaan. God blessed Joseph after his brothers had sold him into slavery and he had become the second in command to Pharaoh. Because of Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, he was able to prepare Egypt for the famine and saved the Egyptians from starvation. The Egyptians forgot the blessings they had received by Joseph and the Jews. They became fearful of their growing population. In reaction, they enslaved them. Before delivering Israel from Pharaoh, God waited for the wickedness of the Amorites, who lived in Canaan, to reach its fulfillment (Genesis 15.16). Out of Egypt, God commanded the Jews to occupy the land (Exodus 23.23, 27). He promised He would give them the land and drive out the inhabitants methodically (Exodus 23.29-33). They only needed to believe/obey Him (Exodus 23.28). Unfortunately, they refused. That first generation sent twelve spies into the land at Kadesh (קדש).

The people feared the sons of Anak more than they believed God and refused to go into the land (Numbers 13; Deuteronomy 1.22-32; cf. Hebrews 3.7-19). Instead, they wandered the desert for 40 years until they died.

When the next generation came to the land they faced the same test. Would they believe God or would they be like their fathers and die in unbelief? The spiritual leaders of the first generation were Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. They believed God. They wished to take the land but were prevented by the majority. Moses died and God would not allow him to enter the land because of his disobedience at the second Kadesh crisis (Numbers 20.7-12). Joshua, Moses' successor, along with Caleb, who had given the minority report of the spies and believed

God, entered the land.

Joshua sent two spies to reconnoiter the land. They came to the city of Jericho, to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. The king of Jericho discovered the spies and ordered Rahab to bring them to him. Instead, Rahab disobeyed the king and hid the spies (Joshua 2.1-7). Why would she do this? From the human point of view, she had nothing to gain and everything to lose. The Bible reveals Rahab's thoughts (Joshua 2.8-24). Even though the majority in Israel did not believe God, she did. She had faith! Rahab, a pagan Gentile, had more faith than the millions of Jews who had witnessed God's miracles (Hebrews 11.13). She had *seen* no miracles. She had *heard* what God had done and trusted that the God of Israel was greater than the gods of Egypt or her gods.

Rahab was quite a woman. What became of her? She married Salmon and had a son, Boaz. This man married Ruth. Their love story is recorded in the book of Ruth. Rahab is in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1.5). She is one of His great-grandmothers! Truly, God can do anything. Question: how does a woman go from being a prostitute to the grandmother of the Lord Jesus Christ? Answer: With God, nothing is impossible.

Naaman the Syrian

Naaman commanded the king of Syria's military. The Scriptures tell us he was a great man (□□□□□□) and exalted (□□□□□□). God was working behind the scenes with Naaman. We read that by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. Despite these blessings, Naaman had a major problem—his health. He had an incurable disease: he was a leper.

One of Naaman's military victories resulted in the capture of a young Jewish girl. This girl became a servant of Naaman's wife. She loved her mistress and saw her heavy heart due to husband's condition. One day she exclaimed, "I wish that my

master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5.3). Those simple words fomented an international crisis.

The king of Syria learned of this conversation. Was it possible? Did a prophet reside in Israel who could heal leprosy? Because Naaman was so valuable to his kingdom, the Syrian king wrote a letter to Israel's king. Accompanying the letter, he sent ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothes. This was a huge fortune. When Israel's king read the letter he became extremely upset (2 Kings 5.7). How could he heal leprosy? Was the letter a pretense? Was the Syrian king trying to provoke war? Elisha the prophet also heard the news. He told the king to send word for Naaman to come to him. Elisha would heal him and "he shall know there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5.8).

After receiving the king's reply Naaman gathered his entourage and chariot and came to Elisha's house. Undoubtedly, he mused as he traveled how Elisha would heal him. The visit was anticlimactic. Upon his arrival, Elisha did not even come to the door. He sent his servant, who told Naaman, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean" (2 Kings 5.10).

Naaman was livid. What joke was this? Had he made the journey to be insulted and made a fool of? Did this prophet know who he was? He was CinC Syrian army: top general—flag rank—four star. The Scriptures provide Naaman's thoughts after he returned home (2 Kings 5.11-12). He had expected Elisha to come and put on a show. Furthermore, the Jordan was dirty! Syrian rivers were much cleaner than the Jordan! The effrontery! The nerve!

Fortunately, Naaman's servants calmed him. They prevailed upon him to reconsider. Basically, they told him, "What have you to lose? Had he told you to do some great thing wouldn't you have done it? Give it a try!"

Naaman listened to his junior officers and responded to their advice. He went to the Jordan and entered the water. One wonders how this went. Did his leprosy begin to leave each time he dipped himself? Did nothing happen until he had dipped himself seven times? The main point is Naaman obeyed. He did what Elisha told him to do. He was healed. His flesh became like the skin of a small child. Naaman had the most beautiful skin in Syria. He could have done commercials.

Naaman's words upon his return to Elisha reveal his heart: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5.15). He further declared, "For your servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." Naaman asked Elisha for two mule's load of earth to take back to Syria as holy ground to worship the Lord. Naaman, the great general, was healed of leprosy. But greater than this, he came to know the God of glory.

Ruth the Moabitess¹

Due to a famine in the time of the judges, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Chilion, moved from Bethlehem to east of the Dead Sea, to the adjoining country of Moab to find food. Elimelech died and the sons married Moabite women: Mahlon married Ruth and Chilion married Orpah. These two sons died also. After about ten years in Moab, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She told her daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers and remarry. Orpah left Naomi reluctantly but found wisdom in her words. Ruth saw things differently. We read,

¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if

anything but death parts you and me.”¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her (Ruth 1.16-18).

By this declaration, Ruth revealed she had embraced the God of Israel and wished to identify with Naomi and her kindred. Apparently, the Elimelech family conducted itself in a way that attracted Ruth so that she recognized that the God of Israel was the true God. She was willing to trust the LORD (YHVH) rather than the gods of Moab.

The rest of the story is quite a story. Ruth married Boaz, Naomi's kinsman redeemer. He was of the line of Judah, which would become the kingly line; he was David's great-grandfather. Thus, Ruth was David's great-grandmother. Who would guess an impoverished Moabite woman, bereft of her husband, would become the great-grandmother of King David and ancestor of the Messiah? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Jonah and the Ninevites

Jonah was a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel and ministered in the 8th century B.C. Jonah was the most reluctant evangelist who ever lived. God told Jonah,

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1.2).

Nineveh was to the northeast. Jonah headed due west. We read,

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1.3).

The irony of Jonah is that he was the most successful

evangelist in history. Wherever he went people were saved. When he was in the will of God people were saved. When he was out of the will of God people were saved. Does God have a sense of humor?

Jonah boarded the ship and God brought a storm along. The sailors were terrified and called upon their gods. They were Gentiles, pagans. Was Jonah worried? Not the least. He was fast asleep in the belly of the ship. The sailors were incredulous. How could anyone sleep in the middle of a tempest? The captain went below deck and said:

“How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish” (Jonah 1.5).

Jonah went on deck, the sailors cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. They demanded Jonah tell who he was. We read,

He said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1.9).

Hearing this, they became more frightened and demanded Jonah tell them what they should do to calm the storm. Jonah told them to throw him overboard (Jonah 1.12). The men were quite noble. Instead, they rowed harder and tried to make landfall. When they saw they could not prevail an amazing transformation occurred:

Then they called on the LORD and said, “We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased” (Jonah 1.14).

These men, who before had called upon their false gods, now called upon Jonah’s God, the God who made the sea and the dry land. Only after this did they throw Jonah into the sea (Jonah

1.15).

These men were saved. We know this not only from their words but from their action. As soon as they cast Jonah into the sea, the waves flattened and the sea calmed. When they saw this they knew their trust was well-placed. We read:

Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows (Jonah 1.16).

Their sacrifice to YHVH was evidence of their faith.

As for Jonah, he went into the fish and came out three days later (Jonah 1.17, 2.10). During those three days, Jonah had time to think about his behavior. He repented and recognized God's greatness. The Lord then caused the fish to expel Jonah upon the land.

Back on land, the Lord spoke to Jonah again:

¹ Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

As Jonah walked he shouted, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3.4). Those words had remarkable effect. We read:

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them (Jonah 3.5).

The Assyrian king wrote a proclamation which read:

⁷ *“In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish” (Jonah 3.7-9).*

The people believed Jonah. This is striking. Jonah was a Jew—an enemy of the Assyrians. But they believed him. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, the most populous city in the world. It took three days to walk across its area—a land mass comparable to modern cities such as Chicago or Los Angeles. Jonah 4.11 states the city had 120,000 who did not know their left from right hand. Assuming this comprised children under the age of two, Nineveh’s population was probably about 3 million citizens.

As a result of the king’s action we read:

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it (Jonah 3.10).

Did all the people repent and believe God? Most likely not. But a significant enough number did for God to change His mind about destroying them. Thus, Jonah became the greatest evangelist in history and made him immensely—unhappy.

Nebuchadnezzar

About a hundred years after the northern kingdom, Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar,² who ruled the Babylonian empire (Daniel 1.1), captured the southern kingdom,

Judah. This event is known as the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon teenage Jewish boys who were identified as the best and the brightest to be trained for the king's service (Daniel 1.3-5). Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Because Daniel described and interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's terrifying dream which occurred in the second year of his reign, the king elevated him to the number two position in the kingdom. Daniel was probably only about 17 at the time of his promotion.

Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to Daniel after the interpretation was remarkable. We read,

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery" (Daniel 2.46-47).

World rulers do not prostrate before servants. But that was what Nebuchadnezzar did. The king's order had been extraordinary: not only had he commanded his wise men to interpret his dream, he demanded they tell him *what* he had dreamed. Nebuchadnezzar knew it was a near-impossible command. But Daniel did it. The king recognized God alone had this power. When Daniel revealed the dream, he was overwhelmed.

God got Nebuchadnezzar's attention but human arrogance can be all-consuming. Nebuchadnezzar had absolute power. Whatever he wished was done. At a later period, another incident occurred in which the king encountered God. He constructed a golden image (Daniel 3.1) which everyone was commanded to worship. When Daniel's friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) refused, the king's envious magicians and counselors reported them. When the king questioned them they stood their ground:

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3.16-18).

These men had chutzpah. But when Nebuchadnezzar heard their reply he became so enraged his facial features disfigured (Daniel 3.19). He ordered his servants to heat the furnace seven times hotter than normal and throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into it. What occurred next was unexpected. We read:

²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!"

The king's facial features rearranged—in astonishment. The fourth man, was, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Nebuchadnezzar declared:

²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating

the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

Nebuchadnezzar's decree read:

¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! ² It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³ "How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation (Daniel 4.1-3).

Nebuchadnezzar had seen great evidence of God. But some men must be shaken to their core for God to get their full attention. Nebuchadnezzar was such a man. God gave one last dream which Daniel interpreted:

²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. ²⁶ And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, may my advice be

pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity' (Daniel 4.24-27).

A year passed without incident. Then we read:

The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty' (Daniel 4.30)?

Upon uttering these words the dream's warning was fulfilled:

³¹ *While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes' (Daniel 4.31-32).*

For seven years, the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, sovereign of the world, lived as an animal. To all appearances he was mad. During those years, Daniel watched and cared for him. Nebuchadnezzar was a tough nut. But God cracked him. Nebuchadnezzar wrote his testimony:

³⁴ *"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵ "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He*

does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'³⁶ At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

What a testimony! Whether Nebuchadnezzar was a believer in the God of Israel before his abasement is hard to say. But after this incident, he was. Nebuchadnezzar became a believer in the God of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ. His words are those of a deeply humbled man. He came to know the God of glory.

Darius / Cyrus

Darius is introduced in Daniel 6. He defeated Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar (the one who witnessed the disembodied hand writing on the wall) ruled Babylon.

Darius, i.e., Cyrus³ took the impregnable city of Babylon by an ingenious ploy in which he diverted the Euphrates to allow his army to be able to march beneath the city walls. Darius' victory was just as Daniel had predicted in Nebuchadnezzar's first vision.

After establishing his administration, Darius appointed Daniel as his number two man. Darius' other ministers became envious and sought a means to destroy him (Daniel 6.1-5). They devised a plot in which Daniel became entangled but Darius saw through their treachery too late. He desperately tried to deliver Daniel. But having signed the law, he was powerless. The law of the Medes and Persians was irreversible. This was the situation:

¹⁴ Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed" (Daniel 6.14-15).

Literally, the Aramaic for "deeply distressed" or as the KJV renders, "was sore displeased with himself" (ܐܘܪܝܘܬܐ ܕܢܘܒܐ ܕܢܘܒܐ ܕܢܘܒܐ), reads "he had a great stink on himself" or "he stank." The king was angry with himself for allowing himself to be duped. Such deception was odious to Darius. The king loved Daniel but had no choice but to put him into the lion's den. We read the king's thoughts and actions on the matter:

¹⁶ Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." ¹⁷ A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him (Daniel 6.16-18).

When dawn broke, Darius ran to the lion's den to learn Daniel's fate. Calling to him, he was overjoyed to hear Daniel's voice and find him safe. He removed Daniel from the lions and threw Daniel's enemies into the pit for their treachery.⁴ As a result of Daniel's great deliverance, Darius wrote:

²⁵ Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! ²⁶ I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. ²⁷ "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6.25-27).

Such words indicate Darius/Cyrus recognized and trusted in Daniel's God.

Gentiles in the Gospels

Most of Christendom fails to recognize that neither Jesus nor the Twelve had a ministry to Gentiles. The gospels are "Old Testament." They merely pick up God's dealings with Israel from Malachi. How can most in Christendom look to the Twelve, and Peter in particular, when they never ministered to Gentiles? Jesus Himself commanded them not to go to Gentiles but to confine their ministry to Israel (Matthew 10.5-6). Even after His resurrection, we find no indication these apostles had a ministry to Gentiles. They ministered to Jews only (Acts 11.19). But God always has a place for exceptions as evidenced above. In His earthly ministry, Jesus dealt with two Gentiles: the Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-13; Luke 7.1-10) and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15.21-28). I have dealt with these personages in my article [Two Remarkable Healings](#) so will not do it here. Suffice to say, these Gentiles exercised remarkable faith and believed in the Lord.

The Apostle Paul

We have seen that when God established the Abraham Covenant (Genesis 12), He began a program in which He would deal

directly with Jews only. Within that context, some Gentiles came to know Him through their contact with Israel. This continued through Jesus' earthly ministry and the ministry of the Twelve. The book of Acts is the record of Israel's fall, of their failure to accept the King and the kingdom, and how God turned to Gentiles through the apostle Paul. At this present time, God has set national Israel aside temporarily (Romans 11.11-25). The provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant remain in effect, however.

When God saved and commissioned Paul, He placed him as His channel of blessing to Gentiles in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant. He, as a Jew, became the proxy of believing Israel through which Gentiles could be blessed. The prophets had revealed that God had promised Gentiles would be blessed by Israel (Isaiah 11.10, 42.1, 6, 49.6, 22, 60.3, 5, 11, 62.2; Zechariah 8.22-23). But this blessing assumed an *obedient* Israel. God had no provision to bless the nations with a disobedient and unfaithful Israel. According to the prophetic revelation, Gentile blessing required every Jew had to repent and accept Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 2.14, 22, 36-39).⁵ This will occur (Romans 11.26). After this, God will establish His kingdom on the earth and Gentiles will be blessed in the way the prophets foresaw. In the days of the apostles, Israel failed. But God way's are unsearchable. God delights in mercy and had an unrevealed plan in which He could bless Gentiles.

Paul became God's unrevealed source for blessing Gentiles. No one before Paul taught Jew and Gentile were equal in Christ (Galatians 3.26-28). Such an idea was unthinkable to Peter. He fought, hammer and tongs, not to go to the Gentile, Cornelius' house. When he arrived, he told him it was unlawful to associate with him (Acts 10.28). After Peter returned to Jerusalem the believers rebuked him for going to a Gentile (Acts 11.2-3). Such an event demonstrates how alien and radical Paul's revelation towards Gentiles was. No one before

Paul taught the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.13; Ephesians 3.6; Colossians 3.11). The Twelve knew nothing of it until they learned it from Paul (Ephesians 3.5-7). Paul was "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13; Acts 9.15; Galatians 1.11-12) while Peter and the Twelve were "apostles of Israel." God revealed "secrets" ([μυστήριον](#)) to Paul which pertained to the Church (which is predominantly Gentile) of which the Twelve had no knowledge. Paul proclaimed salvation by faith alone, which was unknown in Israel's history (cf. Galatians 3.6-9).

Conclusion

God dealt with the entire human race for 2,000 years. He then called Abraham and created a new race, the Jews, through whom He revealed His prophetic plan. During this period, some Gentiles responded to God and were saved under the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Jews operated under God's covenants and prophetic plan for 2,000 years until God saved Paul. After this, God revealed to Paul a plan He had kept hidden from Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. The Lord Himself did not reveal it in His earthly ministry and the Twelve knew nothing of it. Since Israel rejected the King and the kingdom, instead of initiating the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation, which was the next event on the prophetic schedule, God delayed His judgment and provided mercy to the world. He saved Paul and revealed a plan in which He could bless Gentiles in spite of Israel's national disobedience. In this plan, Jew and Gentile became equal in Christ. This plan has operated for almost 2,000 years and will end in the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Roman 11.25), the completion of the Church, the body of Christ. After this, God will remove His Church (Rapture) and revisit His prophetic program with Israel. This program will culminate with His return (Matthew 23.37-39). After this, He will establish his long-anticipated kingdom (Isaiah 11.1-9) .

For the Scriptures to make sense we must let them lay out as

they are. When men force one area of Scripture onto another area, mix Israel and the Church, law and grace, salvation by faith alone and salvation by faith and works, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, the apostleship of the Twelve and Paul's apostleship, the prophetic plan of Israel and Paul's revelations to the body of Christ, contradiction and confusion results. God is the same throughout all generations. But His methods of dealing with men through those generations vary. God is sovereign. He does as He pleases. Dealing solely with Gentiles, choosing Israel, revealing the Church, and returning to Israel are His prerogatives. For one to understand the Scriptures and to become a mature believer one must allow God to be God and the Scriptures to mean what they say.

¹ Some contend Ruth was a Jew, not a Moabitess because Deuteronomy 23.3-6 excluded Moabites from Israel until the tenth generation. They argue Ruth was a Jew who lived in Moab for if she was a Moabite she could not be David's great-grandmother (Matthew 1.5-6) for David was the third generation. On the surface, this may seem a reasonable position. But a number problems exist with this view. When Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to their families they replied, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people" (Ruth 1.10). If Ruth was a Jew, it is unlikely she would refer to Naomi's people as "your" people. Later in the text, Naomi said to Ruth, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." Implied is that Ruth should return to her Moabite people and gods. Ruth is called repeatedly, "Ruth the Moabitess" (Ruth 1.4, 22, 2.2, 6, 10, 21, 4.5, 10), who came to a people she did not know previously (Ruth 2.11), and that she came to seek refuge in the God of Israel (Ruth 2.12). Lastly, Ruth's words to Naomi are strong evidence she was not Jewish (Ruth 1.16). No Jew would say to a fellow Jew, "Your people *shall* be my people, and your God, my God." As far as I can tell, Jewish commentators all agree Ruth was not a Jew, but a

Moabite. How is the Deuteronomic prohibition resolved? The word for Moabite in Deuteronomy 23.3 is מֹאבִי, the masculine form of the noun. While the masculine form is inclusive of the female gender in many contexts, the next verse explains the reason for the prohibition: “because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.” The Talmud explains that only the men could have made such a decision and therefore the prohibition applied to the men, not the women. Therefore, Ruth had no legal problem.

² God described Nebuchadnezzar as “my servant” (Jeremiah 25.9, 27.6, 43.10).

³ Identification of Darius the Mede has been a knotty historical problem. Some have identified him with Gubaru, Cyrus the Great, or others. Some state he never existed. From the biblical texts, it appears the names Darius the Mede, king of Persia, Cyrus, king of Persia, and Artaxerxes refer to the same person (Ezra 4.5, 6.14; Daniel 6.28). This individual seems to have been the son of Esther and Ahasuerus (Daniel 9.1, cf. Esther 1.1, 2.16-17). Below are the references to each:

Darius	Cyrus	Artaxerxes
Ezra 4.5, 24, 5.5-7, 6.1, 12-15; Nehemiah 12.22; Daniel 5.31, Daniel 6.1, 6, 9, 25, 28, 9.1, 11.1; Haggai 1.1, 15, 2.10; Zechariah 1.1, 7, 7.1	2 Chronicles 36.22-23; Ezra 1.1-2, 7-8, 3.7, 4.3, 5, 5.13-14, 17, 6.3, 14; Isaiah 44.28, 45.1; Daniel 1.21, 6.28, 10.1	Ezra 4.7-8, 11, 23, 6.14, 7.1, 7, 11-12, 21, 8.1; Nehemiah 2.1, 5.14, 13.6

⁴ The lions were ravenous. They dismembered Daniel’s enemies before they reached the bottom of the den (Daniel 6.24).

⁵ The Scriptures explicitly state all Israel will one day be

saved (Romans 11.26). Jesus declared He would return only when Israel repented (Matthew 23.37-39).

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