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WHY THIS PRIORITY FOR THE JEW?

JOHN G. RIDLEY, M.C.

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— Rom. 1 : 16.

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WHY THIS PRIORITY FOR THE JEW?

BY JOHN G. RIDLEY, M.C.

"To the Jew first."—Rom. 1 : 16.

It is the motto text of the Jewish Evangelical Witness, and a worthy one, too. Yet, strange to say, it is one of the most resented and resisted utterances of Holy Scripture.

"To the Jew first." "I like that," retorts one. "Why should the Jew have any priority or preference over other people, when his record should relegate him to the last and lowest place among the children of men?"

"True!" supports a seconder. "From my personal knowledge of Jews and Jewish history, I would say—'The Jew last'."

"Quite so!" thunders a third voice. "Away with all this nonsense of time and money for the Jew first, when the Bible plainly declares 'God is no respecter of persons'."

Yes, yes! We have heard all these protests time and again, and yet the Word of the Lord still asserts this simple proclamation of priority: **"To the Jew first."**

The priorities of God are part and parcel of the Sovereignty of God, and woe be to him who presumes to protest against the sovereign rights of the Most High. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9 : 20).

Glance at some of God's great priorities:—

1. **In Creation:** "I suffer not a woman . . . to usurp authority over a man . . . for Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2 : 12-13).

2. **In Commandments:** "Jesus answered him,

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord thy God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12 : 29-30).

3. **In Counsel and Commodities:** "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6 : 33).

4. **In Christian Conduct:** "Let them learn first to show piety at home" (1 Tim. 5 : 4).

5. **In Condemnatory Judgments:** "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7 : 5).

6. **Concerning Children:** "Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto Me all the firstborn in Israel" (Num. 3 : 13).

7. **Concerning the Order of Christ's Second Coming:** "The dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4 : 16).

There are other Divine priorities, but these will serve to show that in other matters and men, beside the Jew, God has His Sovereign order of preference. Thus, I repeat, the motto text of the J.E.W. is a worthy one: **"To the Jew first."** Let us prove it so.

God Almighty gave priority and preference to the Jews first because He loved them: "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but **BECAUSE THE LORD LOVED YOU**" (Deut. 7 : 7-8). Said Robert McCheyne, of saintly memory: "Strange, sovereign, most

peculiar love! He loved them because He loved them."

Yes, and because of this love gave them:—

PRIORITY IN PRESERVING AND PUBLISHING HIS WORD

1. **Priority in Preserving and Publishing His Word:** "What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 31 : 2). Note the word "chiefly." The prime and principal privilege of this people was to preserve God's Oracles—His Word. "The Jews," said Matthew Henry, "were the Christians' library keepers. They were entrusted with the sacred treasure for their own use and benefit in the first place, and then for the advantage of the world; and in preserving the letter of the Scripture, they were very faithful to their trust." The Old Testament, which our Lord read, and studied, and quoted from as the Word of God, came down to His hands unmarred and unmutilated because the people He loved had preserved it.

Think! The Bible—the Word of God—has priority over all other publications; over all other books and words. Why? Because it is God's Word.

"The Lord gave the Word" (Ps. 68 : 11). Gave it through "Holy men of old, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Think! It was written by holy men of Israel—Holy Jews. The Psalms of David; the Books of Moses; the Proverbs and Song of Songs of Solomon; the Prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and others—yea, all that tells of Christ and His coming to earth; His sufferings and death; His resurrection and glory, came flowing through Jewish channels.

"The Lord gave the Word." Yes, but He gave it almost entirely through despised sons of Israel.

The Evangelists of the New Testament, with the possible exception of Luke, were Jews. Paul, who expounded the mighty truths of the Church, was a "Jew of Tarsus." Peter was a Jew. John, James, and Jude were Jewish men. These Words, on which we stake our hopes for Eternity and Eternal Salvation, came to us via the Jews. These Words, exalted above the words of all the wise and ancient sages; these Words, which have quickening power; which convey to us eternal life; which will abide when heaven and earth pass away, came to us via the seed of Israel—the despised Jews.

Forget not, that great as is God's name, He has magnified His Word above all His name (Ps. 138 : 2). Oh, let us be loyal to God's priority. "The Bible is worth all other books that have ever been printed," said Patrick Henry. "The Bible is no mere book, but a Living Creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it," declared the great Napoleon.

Yes, and this "Living Creature," and these "Lively Oracles," have been preserved, and protected, and published, and passed on to us by Jews. Therefore He who rewards for every good thing that a man doeth saith:

"TO THE JEW FIRST."

PRIORITY OF PERSONS

2. "To the Jew first." Why? Because in His love to them He granted them Priority of Persons. Via the Jews came the Son of God. The Son of God has priority over all sons of men. He is Son of man, as well as Son of God.

Alexander the Great came via the Greeks,

and he conquered all except his sinful self. Napoleon the Great, "The Man of Destiny," came via the French, and he established an empire and lost it. Lord Nelson came via the English, and he was "great with a colossal greatness": he saved England, but, unable to save himself, "committed his soul to God that it might be saved by the merits of Jesus Christ." This we read in his Will.

Socrates came via the Athenians, was called "the noblest man of this world," and yet, dying, left no glowing hope for mankind.

Washington came via the Americans, and was greeted as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Yet, at his tomb, five years ago, I listened to a faithful negro, guardian of his grave, extol "the father of his country" with glowing words, until I mentioned Jesus Christ, and then his face shone with a new light, and he forgot Washington in worthy words of praise for "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He saw his Saviour, towering like Mt. Everest, above Washington and every other person.

Look yonder! See that lofty figure by Jacob's well talking to a woman. Harken to her startled voice! "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." Why? Why? "Thou, being a Jew." Why? Listen! "Salvation is of the Jews." That which no other son of man can produce is provided by a Jew. "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things." Ah, woman! He has come! Yea, come in the fullness of time: come in the way foretold.
Born of a Jewish Virgin.

"Then the Spirit of the Highest
On a Virgin meek came down,
And He burdened her with blessing,
And He pained her with renown,
For she bear the Lord's Anointed
For His cross and for His crown.

Earth for Him had groaned and travailed
Since the ages first began,
For in Him was hid the secret
That through all the ages ran—
Son of Mary, Son of David,
Son of God, and Son of Man."

Salvation is of the Jews. Born in a Jewish town.

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by:
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light —
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight."

Salvation is of the Jews. Brought up in a Jewish village. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Come and see!

Hailed and heralded by a Jewish prophet. John, called the "Greatest born of woman" in the old Dispensation, seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me." Ah! here is Priority and Preference with a punch of power from the prince of Prophets: "He . . . is preferred before me: because He was before me."

True, the nation will not prefer Him before John, nor before Barabbas; but God, Who sent Him "to the lost sheep of the House of Israel," will prefer Him before all sons of men; and will manifest before Jews and Gentiles that He Who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh is declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrecting from the dead (Romans 1 : 3-4).

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted HIM, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus"—yea, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jew—"every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2 : 9-11).

Oh, my brethren, let us hold to the Man of God's priority! "Salvation is of the Jews." "To the Jew first!" Said Martin Luther: "These Jews are closely related to our Lord. Accord to them the Christian Law of Love."

PRIORITY OVER ALL SPIRITS AND POWERS

3. "To the Jew first." Why? Because via the Jews came the Holy Spirit with Priority over all spirits and powers. Look at yon upper room in old Jerusalem. About 120 believing Jews are waiting on God. They are worshipping, praising, and blessing God, with great joy. There is no discord or dissimulation among them. They are of "one accord," in one ministry of prayer and praise, with but one ambition ahead. True it is, that outside the strong world, which has just crucified Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, is ready and able to crucify His few followers. Nevertheless, His promise is ringing in their hearts and ears: "Ye shall receive power after that

the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me." They believe! Power is their need, and Power is their promised supply. Power it must be! Jesus is glorified and the Father will not fail. Power will be given. Power from on high.

Then comes the Day of Pentecost—i.e., "The Fiftieth." Lo! it is a Jewish festival, called "The Feast of Weeks," because observed seven weeks after the Passover. Suddenly there is a sound like a hurricane wind. It is from Heaven! It is filling the house! It is filling the heart! Tongues of Fire, or "like unto fire," are falling upon each. They—these Jews—are filled with the Holy Ghost and power. Then lo! they go forth conquering and to conquer! "Mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

Look at Peter! The craven, cowardly denier of seven weeks ago, is on fire, preaching with all boldness. Mark you, he is a Jew; he is preaching to Jews, and about three thousand are surrendering to the Saviour, "Jesus of Nazareth." Pentecost was a Jewish feast; Jewish disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost; Jewish sinners, fresh from the foul crime of Calvary's Cross, were the converts. "To the Jew first!"

Oh, my friends, let us hark back to this Priority of Power. It is all-vital. It is for Jew and Gentile (the Jew first, and then the Gentile). Wesley, who, with Whitefield, was used to revive England, declared: "Nothing but the power which made a world can make a Christian." Finney, who in God's power rocked the United States, said: "Wherever He—the Holy Ghost—went, all forms of doubt and unbelief vanished." The Maréchal, who planted the banner of Blood and Fire in France

in spite of terrific opposition, said: "The only professor I ever had was the Holy Spirit. I never went to Bible college, or training school. He taught me the Bible. He gave me power."

Let others talk of other spirits, and powers, of wisdom, education, personality, etc.—I would go back to God's priority and preference in this matter. "I would rather," said D. L. Moody, "have one atom of this Divine Power than every other degree and variety of power in the world combined."

This Priority of Power to the Jew first, and then to the Church, is our present need and, glory to God, is still available to claiming faith.

PRIORITY OVER ALL OTHER PREACHING

4. "To the Jew first." Why? Because via the Jews came the Gospel with Priority over all other Preaching.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." How grandly those Jewish Christians responded to the Great Commission. "They went everywhere preaching the Gospel" with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Peter and John preached in Jerusalem. Philip went down to Samaria and preached it there, and then out into the desert to preach it there. Peter travelled to Caesarea to preach to a Gentile soldier and his household. Saul of Tarsus, "circumcised the eight day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews," preached it in the synagogues, in Damascus, in Asia, in Europe, and finally in Rome. He preached it faithfully, fearlessly, fervently and fully—"From Jeru-

salem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15 : 19).

Paul preached the Gospel confidently. He believed in its power. He counted it mightier than Roman might when Rome was "Mistress of the world." "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every-one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Paul gave the Gospel exclusive priority. "Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1 : 8).

Ah! my friends, God's message has a pre-eminent priority stamp upon it! It is the only message for a dying world. Mr. William Gladstone, one time Prime Minister of England, said to Dr. Talmage: "We may talk about questions of the day here and there, but there is only one question and that is how to apply the Gospel to all circumstances and conditions. It can and will correct all that is wrong." How true! It is God's Remedy for mankind's ruin. It is God's Defence for man against devilish purposes of disaster. How we need to fall back upon God's pre-eminent message at this hour!

A shadow is deepening over the world. Satanic forces are mustering and moving against God's Church. "The Gospel," said Principal Forsyth, "is fighting for its life inside the Churches, as well as outside."

On October 20, 1805, the day before Trafalgar, thirty-four French and Spanish ships were sailing forth to battle. In his diary, Lord

Nelson (commanding twenty-six British ships) wrote: "The enemy seem determined to push to the westward. That they shall not do, if in the power of Nelson to prevent them." It was in his power. He not only prevented but pulverised them at the cost of his life. A Greater than Nelson will soon arise and fight for us; and Jews and Gentiles, washed in the Blood of the Lamb, will, by the power of the Gospel, behold Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, but there the King in His beauty will reign in triumph as final proof of the Power of God's Priority (Isaiah 33 : 20-22).

My friend, be you Jew or Gentile, have you embraced the Gospel of God? If not, **believe** it and **receive** it at this moment. It is the only "power unto salvation" under Heaven. To believe it with all the heart means eternal salvation. To refuse it and despise it means eternal condemnation. Herein lies the deciding factor in the eternal destiny of every man.

(This message was first given at Melbourne, Victoria, in September, 1953, on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the Jewish Evangelical Witness.)

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