

## The Advantage of Being Jewish

How We Got Our Bible – Part I  
Why We Know It's True

Romans 3:1-2

### Introduction

If you have ever heard this classic, by Hans Christian Andersen, you have probably never forgotten it.

Once upon a time, there lived a king who loved fine clothing and jewels. He was often seen parading about town in his latest, custom tailored royal clothing. Hats, pants, robes, and shirts were exquisitely made to suit his rather portly figure. One day, several philosophers came to visit. These men were actually con men. They claimed they could make clothing more exquisite and fine than any suit of clothing the king owned in his vast closet. They offered to weave an expensive suit for him. The king was especially intrigued by the idea that the cloth they wove was so unusual and rare that the only people who could see the material were the wise and pure in heart. If a person was not wise or pure in heart, they would not be able to appreciate the beauty of the king's new clothes. He was delighted and immediately hired them to weave his new clothing at any cost.

These clever men sat before empty looms and pretended to be weaving. It was not long before the king sent one of his political leaders to observe the progress of the weavers. The leader did not see anything on the looms. He rubbed his eyes, but still, the looms seemed empty to him. Not wanting to be considered unwise or impure of heart, he came back to the king and declared that the clothing was absolutely beautiful. About that time, the weavers demanded more money. Some time later, the king

grew impatient once again and sent another of his comrades to observe the progress. He also saw nothing, but not wanting to be accused of being unwise or impure, he also came back and reported to the king that the clothing would be the talk of the entire kingdom. Finally, the king himself went and, although he too saw nothing, he did not want to appear foolish or impure, so he announced that the clothing was indeed magnificent. He then awarded the weavers with medals and more money.

The day finally arrived for the grand parade. The clever weavers went through elaborate motions of dressing the king in his new clothes and then, they left town. Meanwhile, the king paraded through his realm in nothing but his "birthday suit". The whole kingdom joined in praising his beautiful clothes, lest they let on to everyone around them that they were wicked fools. This ridiculous parade continued – until that moment when a child, standing in the throng of spectators, was heard to say, "Mommy, the king has no clothes."

At once everyone knew the truth. The innocence of an honest child, who did not know anything about what he was supposed to see, had unmasked the hypocrisy of an entire nation. In one brief statement, he revealed what everyone else had been pretending, including the king himself.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far in our study through the first two chapters of Romans, the apostle Paul has played the role of an unpretentious messenger. He has revealed the nakedness of the unbeliever; he has revealed that the hands of men cannot fashion clothing that will cover the bareness of sinful hearts.

In spite of its ritual and all its parading and ceremony, the looms of religion, throughout all the world, are empty. It fashions what it pretends will cover the human heart, but in reality, it leaves a person exposed and naked before the one true God to whom they will give an account.

In chapter 1, Paul has exposed the guilt of the unbelieving immoral man who has ignored creation. In chapter 2, he has exposed the moral man who has ignored his conscience. He has stated that both categories of people are found to be without excuse. He writes in Romans:

- chapter 1, verse 20b – “. . . so that they are without excuse” and
- chapter 2, verse 1a – “Therefore you are without excuse . . .”.

In the latter part of chapter 2, Paul has exposed the guilt of the religious man who has spoken truth, but not lived it; the man who has taught morality, but chosen to cover over the thoughts of his immoral mind and heart. He has begun specifically addressing the Jew – the epitome of morality, sound judgment, and passion for the Law of God. And, in the last paragraph of chapter 2, Paul exposes the Jew as being as much in need of true spiritual clothing as the unbelieving Gentile.

This would have been terribly shocking to the Jewish person living in the first century – as shocking as it would have been to that make believe king upon discovering that he was, in fact, naked. The king was not clothed in exquisite, rare, and expensive garments – he was completely uncovered and exposed.

If anyone felt they had a right to go to heaven, it was the Jew. They were sons of Abraham; they were God’s chosen people; they were the people who had received the covenants from God. Yet, Paul said to them, in effect, “None of that is good enough to clothe your sinful hearts – you are still exposed before the gaze of a holy God.”

The writer of Hebrews said, in chapter 4, verse 13,

*. . . there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of [God]. . .*

There is no race of men given an advantage before God! Sons of Abraham or not, nobody has an edge; nobody has strings they can pull to get out from underneath the gaze of God – not the Gentile, and not even the Jew.

Now, for the past forty three verses, Paul has been anticipating and answering the questions and objections of his audience. Under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, Paul has anticipated the next objection that will come from their lips – and he says it for them.

## **What Advantage Has the Jew?**

In Romans, chapter 3, verse 1, he anticipates the objection of the Jew, as he speaks for them. He writes,

*Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?*

In other words, “Paul, if what you’re saying is true, who cares about the temple? What difference does it make to be a son of Abraham? So what about the sacrificial system, the Law, and the rite of circumcision? Why bother with keeping our blood line distinct? Why put up with isolation from the world? Why bother with dietary regulations and Sabbath observances? Why go through the pain of misunderstanding? Why bother with being different?”

They were saying, “Give us one good reason why we should remain Jews. You’ve taken away everything we thought to be unique and special. What advantage is there to being a circumcised Jew, if those things are not a guarantee of getting into heaven?! We might as well throw it all away and live like the rest of the pagan world! Why bother?”

## **History of Jewish suffering**

The Jewish people could look back over their shoulder and see incredible suffering. They have lived the most difficult life of any race of people. They have suffered through centuries of persecution, captivity, humiliation, slavery, and judgment.

The Jew had spent four hundred years in Egypt alone, where they served as penniless, mistreated slaves, until God rescued and delivered them. And, even after their escape, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, until the faithless generation died. Then, after they entered the promised land, they had to fight for every square inch of land, as well as fight to protect it.

Several hundred years later, they were divided by civil war. The nation was split into two kingdoms – the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The disobedience of the northern kingdom brought about judgment, as God brought the Assyrian kingdom against them. The idolatrous southern

kingdom was ripped apart by the Babylonian kingdom. With Jerusalem therefore destroyed, once again the people nearly vanished from their homeland.

Eventually, the Jews were allowed to return. Under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, they rebuilt Jerusalem, but, while one hand was on the trowel, the other was on their sword – constantly threatened with war and extinction.

It was not long before Greece conquered the Jewish homeland. Antiochus Epiphanes, the prefigure of the coming anti-Christ, then desecrated their temple by sacrificing a pig on the holy altar and slaughtering the priests.

Later, under Roman rule, the Jews continued their journey of hardship, pain, and suffering. Tens of thousands of Jews, who rebelled against Rome, were killed – usually by public crucifixion. Under Herod the Great, scores of Jewish male babies were killed because of his paranoid, corrupt jealousy of a baby whom he had been told had been born as the King of the Jews. The nation wept bitter tears at the slaughter of so many children.

Finally, in 70 A.D., the Roman general Titus Vespasian came, under Caesar's orders, to destroy Jerusalem. Rome had had enough of the irksome Jew.

By this time, the origins of Jewish religion were twisted with unnatural maliciousness. It was said that Jews had originated from a company of lepers that had been sent by the king of Egypt to work in the sand quarries, and that a man, named Moses, had rallied this band of lepers and led them through the desert to Palestine. It was said that they worshipped a donkey's head because, in the wilderness, a herd of wild donkeys had led them to water when they were dying of thirst. By this time, Jewish customs were mocked, misunderstood, and even hated.

Think of how many things you do that invite open ridicule and mocking. Imagine doing something related to your belief in God's Word that would invite mockery. Most of the church today does not invite derision from the world, simply because it is so much like the world.

Plutarch wrote that the Jews would not eat pig's flesh because the pig was one of their gods. The Roman writer Juvenal, jested that the Sabbath was observed simply because the Jews were lazy. He said that to the Jew, the flesh of the swine was considered more honorable than the flesh of a human being.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, tells us that Judaism, by this time, had become regarded as a "barbaric superstition," and the Jews were considered "the most disgusting of races."<sup>iii</sup>

So, when Titus came to destroy Jerusalem, he also came to destroy the Jew. According to Josephus, more than a million Jews of all ages were mercilessly butchered, and of those who survived, approximately one hundred thousand were sold into slavery or sent to Rome to die in the gladiator games.

Around this time as well, Gentiles in Caesarea had killed twenty thousand Jews and sold many more into slavery. And, the Gentile residents in Damascus had literally cut the throats of ten thousand Jews in a single day.

Ladies and gentlemen, anti-Semitism can only be explained in light of its demonic origins. Satan hates Jesus Christ, the God-man who chose to be born of Jewish blood. Satan knows the covenant God has made with Israel. In fact, therein lies the Devil's murderous attacks against the Jew. If Satan can get rid of the Jew, he can erase God's covenant with Israel. And, if God cannot keep His word with Israel, then He is not God, but a liar.

Furthermore, Satan knows that one hundred forty four thousand Jewish evangelists will be used by God during the great tribulation to cause millions of people to turn to Christ, according to Revelation, chapter 7. He knows the covenant with the Jew will be to restore their land and the city of Jerusalem as the center piece of God's kingdom on earth, according to Revelation, chapter 21. Thus, since time began, Satan has launched his diabolical schemes, his hatred, his bloodlust against the Jew. And he will continue, until he makes one final war against Israel, according to Revelation, chapter 20, and is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire.

You cannot explain the hatred of the Jew apart from Satan and his hatred for Jews.

Often, the Jew suffered because of their own stubbornness and desire for independence. In A.D. 115, the Jews rebelled again against Rome. When this failed, Emperor Hadrian destroyed nine hundred eighty five towns in Palestine and killed at least six hundred thousand Jewish men. So many Jews were sold into slavery that the price of a male Jewish slave was the same as a horse.

Two hundred years later, the Roman emperor formulated a legal code that declared Jews to be an inferior race of human beings. This was a demonic

idea, of course, that permeated Europe for more than a thousand years.

In the thirteenth century, Jews were banished from France. In the fifteenth century, they were exiled from Spain.

During the French Revolution, thousands of Jews were killed. And, again in 1818, tens of thousands were massacred in the Ukraine.

In the 1940's, the demonically inspired Adolph Hitler sought to exterminate all Jewish blood from Europe. He would do nothing more than the bidding of Satan. Hitler's hatred for Christ and the cross – symbolized by the swastika, which was a cross broken at all ends – led him to do the thing on earth that Satan longs to do and will continue to do, until Christ banishes him to hell forever, and that is, attempt to wipe the Jew off the face of the earth.

One historian records that, as Hitler's troops marched together, they would often sing this song as a marching tune,

*Sharpen the knives on the pavement stone;  
Sink the knives into Jewish flesh and bone;  
Let the blood flow freely.*

Hitler's regime would kill six million Jews. I have toured the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C. and could not believe what I saw and heard.

Still, to this day, the Jews who have returned to the land of their forefathers are in the newspapers and on the televised news reports nearly every day, as they fight to keep their land.

From a purely historical perspective, the Jews have been treated more ruthlessly and mercilessly than any other people of all time. The pages of history are stained with the blood of the Jew.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Truths about salvation**

Now read Romans, chapter 3, verse 1. With that history as your backdrop, even though the Jews of Romans, chapter 3, do not know the sufferings of their future, they certainly know the sufferings of their past, and it is no wonder they would now say to Paul, "What good is it to be a Jew, if our connection to Abraham, our covenant with God, the circumcision of our flesh, the sacrifices of our altars, and the mistreatment of our people don't get us into heaven? What's the purpose of going through what we go through? What advantage is there to being a Jew?!"

They were saying, "We don't have security *socially*; we don't have security *politically*; we don't

have security *physically*, and now you are telling us that we don't have security *spiritually*!"

By the way, if you give the gospel to a good person who lives a good life, and you reveal to him that salvation is by grace through faith and not of good works, as we are told Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, then he will more than likely say, "Then why bother living a good life?"

If you tell someone who has an upstanding reputation that his reputation means nothing to God in terms of getting into heaven, he will most likely say, "Then what benefit is there to having a good reputation?"

If you tell someone who has avoided the sins of the flesh that they cannot get into heaven simply because they are chaste and pure, they will probably say, "You mean I abstained from that for nothing?"

You need to understand the gospel. You do not do good works in order to get into heaven. You do good works because you are going to heaven. You do not live a holy life so that you will be accepted by God. You strive to live a holy life out of gratitude that God has accepted you already! Getting into heaven is not a matter of what you have done, it is a matter of what Christ has done for you. It is not who you are that matters, it is who Christ is to you that matters.

You did not get saved by being good, which means that you will not lose your salvation by being bad. So then, someone might say, "Then why bother being good?"

Paul will deal with that objection later, but for now, let me at least say that being godly is an evidence of belonging to God.

Spiritual security for the Jew was not being related to Abraham. Paul will continue to work toward the truth that being related to Christ brings spiritual security.

So, the Jew asks,

*Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?*

## **The Jew Was Entrusted With God's Word**

Paul's answer surprises the Jew. They would expect him to say, "It's all worthless!"

Instead he responds, in chapter 3, verse 2,

*Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

The Jew was entrusted with the oracles, or in the Greek “the logia,” the very words of God. The Jew was given the holy Scriptures. And what are the Scriptures? They are nothing less than the written description of God’s eternal nature – who He is; what He is like; what He expects. The Jewish nation was given the inspired, infallible record of the nature and purpose of mankind – who we are; where we came from; how we got lost; and how we are saved.

What an incredible blessing! The Jewish nation – from Moses on Mount Sinai, to the prophets, to Christ Himself and His Apostles – the Jew has been given the honor of being entrusted with the very words of God. The word translated “entrusted,” is the same Greek root word that gives us our word “steward”. They were given the stewardship of God’s words!

Now, Paul has already stated, in chapter 2, that having a copy of the Law, or the Bible, does not make you a child of God. However, having a copy of the Bible is an undeniable privilege and blessing. Paul says, in effect, in Romans, chapter 3, verse 2, “Don’t forget, God chose to give His revelation to and through you, the Jewish nation.”

Have you ever had anyone give you something to take care of for them? You did not own it, they just asked you to watch over it for them.

I remember reading the story of Thomas Edison, when he was working on improving his first light bulb. He finished it and then, handed it to a young boy who was an assistant in the lab. The boy had to take it to the vacuum chamber that was up a set of stairs. He cautiously took each step one at a time, but then, at the last minute, he dropped the bulb. It shattered into a thousand pieces. The whole staff had to spend another twenty four hours making another bulb. When they finished, to the amazement of everyone, Edison handed the new bulb to the same boy.

Imagine that kind of grace, kindness, and patience. Imagine God handing to frail mankind of Jewish origin, the light of His infallible, unchanging, eternal word.

What an incredible privilege. And Paul, in Romans, chapter 3, says to the Jew, “Listen, of all the privileges you’ve had, none can match the ongoing stewardship of receiving and sharing with the rest of the world the words of God.”

Do you own a copy of the Bible? Do you realize the great privilege you have to own one in your language, when millions of people today do not have

even one verse in their own language? What will you do with it this year? For that matter, what will you do with it tomorrow? Is it an ornament for your coffee table – or is it a manual for life?

Paul wrote in II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17,

***All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.***

The Bible:

- is good for teaching or doctrine – that tells you what is true and what you should believe,
- gives you reproof – that tells you where you are wrong,
- gives you correction – that tells you where you are right (the word literally means, “to stand you up on your feet,” so, in other words, the Bible enables you to stand up spiritually, morally), and
- gives you training – this equips you to do what is right.

I will share an example of what the Bible is. When my parents built a home, at one point, my father and I went to view the progress. The living room hearth had been partially bricked, but as we looked at it, we realized it was crooked; it was leaning to one side. We called the contractor, who had the construction crew tear the hearth down and start over. My father and I again inspected the progress and, this time, the nearly completed hearth was leaning to the other side; it was again crooked. We called the contractor, who once again had the construction crew tear the hearth down and start over. Knowing they would not be pleased about this, my father and I left! When we returned to check the work, the hearth had been bricked perfectly straight. We found out later that the contractor, the third time, had stayed to show the construction crew how to brick the hearth correctly.

That is what the Bible is – our contractor who shows us how to live.

Many years ago, a man named Robert Chapman wrote about the Bible. He powerfully summed up our privilege and responsibility as stewards of God’s Word – not only for the Jew of the first century, but for the believer of this century! He wrote,

*This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass and the*

*soldier's sword. It should fill the memory, test the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor and it condemns all who will trifle with its sacred contents. Christ is its grand subject, our good is its design, and the glory of God is its end.<sup>iv</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup> R. Kent Hughes, Romans; Righteousness From Heaven (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1991), p. 71.

<sup>ii</sup> William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Westminster Press, 1975), p. 48.

<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur Jr., Romans (Chicago, Illinois, Moody Press, 1991), p. 64.

<sup>iv</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible (Chicago, Illinois, Moody Press, 1998), p. 31.