

opportunities God has given us (2 Peter 3:11). "Now is the accepted time" to be seeking the Lord.

TALK ABOUT 1. Is there only one way to heaven (John 14:6)? **2.** Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior? **3.** What do we mean by "the Christian Church?" **4.** Do you believe that Jesus Christ will come again? Why is this important? **5.** What did Jesus say we should do (Matt 24:42)?

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The Meaning of . . .

God's Call and Election

or

(to the Jew first)

**Written by
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To the Reader: Keep your Bible beside you. Read the Bible verses as you study. Most of the Bible verses are from the New International Version. You may have a King James Bible or another translation, so the words may be a little different, but the meaning will be the same. Ask God to guide your mind to know His truth. He has promised to do this for you (John 8:32).

Ask a friend to join in the study with you. Share with a friend you may be able to help each other with something that is does not understand. Talk together about the questions. You will be blessed and so will your friend.

GOD'S CALL AND ELECTION

[TO THE JEW FIRST]

An over-emphasis on "the Jew first" is not of God. He will bless those who reach out to others, Jew or Gentile. God commanded us to "love your neighbor" whoever that neighbor might be.

When Peter went to Cornelius' house, he found the whole family gathered to hear what He had to say (Acts 10:23-48). Peter began by saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right."

God created all men and women equal. He put His image on each one (Gen 1:27). He has no favorites. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..." (John 3:16), yet in the counsels of heaven God chose to give the Jew a lofty place and a great hope (Rom 9:4).

The revelation of God and His words came to the world through the Jews. God sent His Son, the Messiah Christ, "born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law..." (Gal 4:4).

Jesus Christ was born of a Jewish mother in the Jewish State of Palestine. He came to His own people. He brought God's message of "repent and believe the good news" to the Jews first, then to the Gentile (Mark 1:15).

TALK ABOUT 1. God chose the Jewish people to be His special t..... (Deut 7:9-10; Ex 19:8)? **2.** God created all men and women e.....? **3.** Gentiles are all peoples who are not Jews ___ True ___False? **4.** What did Peter say to those gathered at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:34)?

GOD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Abraham the Hebrew lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. He was a son of Terah who worshipped idols. One day God called Abram. He said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... I will bless those who bless you... and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:1-3).

Abraham obeyed God's call and set out for a place he knew nothing about,

(John 14:6)? **2.** Will God accept any other sacrifice for sin than the one Christ made by His own death? **3.** Paul said the end of the world will come when Jesus comes to gather His people ___ True ___ False (2 Thess 1:7-10)?

A HEAVENLY KINGDOM (John 18:36)

Jesus did not say that His kingdom would be an earthly Kingdom or last for one thousand years. He did not speak of His physical, bodily return to the Mount of Olives. He spoke of coming in the clouds with His angels (Matt 24:31).

He showed God's Kingdom to be His rule in men's hearts. This rule begins the moment men and women accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. He told His disciples, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (John 14:23; Eph 1:3). He said to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews" (John 18:36).

The present world is only temporary. It will pass away (2 Peter 3:10-13). The world to come is eternal. It can only be eternal because it is spiritual. In it the spirits of redeemed men and women "neither marry nor are they given in marriage, but they are like the angels" (Luke 20:35-36).

COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

Paul used the thought of Israel leaving Babylon and returning to their own land as a call to the Christians in Corinth to leave their heathen ways and associations and live holy lives, separated and set apart for God (2 Cor 6:17-18).

Paul wrote earnest pleas to his fellow Jews to tell them that they must put their faith in Jesus Christ and His death for them. The Jewish believers had been saved by faith in Christ. He delivered them from all that defiled them in their past lives. They were not delivered from Roman rule, but from the power and bondage of sin. They had to guard against taking unholy partners, in marriage or business and keep themselves "from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Christian Church is not a parenthesis in a long list of dispensations as some say, it is what we can see of Christ's Kingdom now. We see only dimly, as if we were looking through a dark glass (1 Cor 13:12).

Paul called the Christian Church "a mystery." God revealed this mystery to Paul and he wrote much about it in the New Testament.

Jesus spoke often of "the last days" but never spoke of anything after that except heaven for the believer and judgment for the unbeliever.

These last days in which we live are truly the last days (Heb 1:1-2). Paul said the end of the world has come upon us (1 Cor 10:11). Peter warns us to be sure we are redeeming the time and making the best use of the

Jesus did not speak of another chance to repent after this life is over, or after He comes again for His people (John 14:1-2).

“Believe in the Lord Jesus (now) and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

TALK ABOUT 1. Will God close the door to heaven? **2.** Will any more people be saved after Jesus Christ comes with His angels (Matt 24:30-31)?

HOW WILL THE JEWS RESPOND?

Praise God many Jews will believe the gospel and receive Christ as their Savior and Lord. They did in the day of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:41; 17:12), and that number has been added to down through the years.

Those who do not know Christ will continue to have “a veil over the hearts” (2 Cor 3:15). They will continue to look for an expansion of the Zionist state and prosperity in goods. The Temple Mount may come under Sate control. If it does, orthodox Jews may build a new temple there and restore animal sacrifices. If they do, it will not change God’s plan. He will not accept any other than the precious sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died and shed His blood once-for-all (Heb 9:12-14). Now there is no more sacrifice for sin to be made (Heb 10:26).

This world and everything built by man will be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:1-10). “Then the end will come, when He (Christ) hands over the Kingdom to God the father, after He (Christ) has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24; 2 Thess 1:7-10). The original preaching of Jesus and His purpose was to establish that reign, or sovereign rule, a spiritual rule (Col 1:13).

Paul did not say “after Christ has reigned on earth for 1,000 years,” He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, but rather “after He has put all His enemies under His feet.” (Death being one of the last and death was destroyed at the cross (Heb 2:14-15). “After He has destroyed all (enemies) dominions, authorities and powers” in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).

“Then the end (telos) will come.” “the absolute end – the termination of world history – rather than a third order implying the resurrection of the lost” (New International Bible Commentary), or a reoccupation of earth.

Paul speaks of the resurrection of the Christian Church, the Body of Christ and their eternal state in heaven. This is “the end” in Paul’s thinking and he addresses comforting words to his Jewish readers: “This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven...with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God. They will be punished... destroyed ... shut out...ON THE DAY He comes to be glorified in His holy people... This includes you, because you believed our testimony...” (2 Thess 1:7-10).

George Fletcher writes, “A revival of Judaism will never succeed. The glory that now excelleteth (2 Cor 3:10). The only glory to follow this day of grace is the eternal glory.”

TALK ABOUT 1. How must men and women come into God’s Kingdom

the land of Canaan or Palestine. “Abraham believed the Lord, and God counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

God also promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a ‘seed’ or son (Gen 13:15-16). Through this one ‘seed’ would come a multitude of descendants, indeed “many nations” (Gen 17:4). The number of Abraham’s offspring would be like “the dust of the earth” or the multitude of stars.

This promise made to Abraham looked far into the future. The promise looked forward to the birth of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church.

Paul tells us, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal 3:16).

The promises pointed to Abraham’s physical descendants, but also to his spiritual children who have faith like that of their father Abraham. Paul wrote, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’ (Gal 3:29). This is the promise of Messiah Christ. Jesus Christ came to earth and filled up the promise made to Abram.

GOD CHOSE THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

The Bible states that God chose the people of Israel as a special people group and made a Covenant or agreement with them (Deut 7:6-8). He said this people group was “the apple of His eye” and His “treasured possession” (Ex 8:22). God demanded their loyalty and worship. If they kept covenant and obeyed God’s commands, He would bless them and multiply their numbers. If they broke covenant, curses would come upon them.

At Mount Sinai God revealed His plan to Moses. He had chosen the people of Israel for a purpose. He said to Moses, “Although the whole earth is Mine, you (the people of Israel) will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6).

The tribes of Israel (Jacob) inherited the promises God made to their ancestor Abraham. God’s covenant with Abraham was embodied in the Law God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex 20). God wanted a kingdom that would show His glory to men and angels. He called the subjects of His Kingdom “priests,” men and women who worship and serve Him. This was a first use in Scripture of the word ‘kingdom’ for God’s people.

God’s Kingdom was not exclusive. It would include citizens from every people, tribe and nation (Rev 7:9). The “same law” must apply to the alien as to the native-born Israelite (Lev 24:22). This worshipping community, in all its diversity, would be to God “a holy nation” set apart for the sole purpose of bringing glory to God (Isa 43:21).

When Moses told the people God’s words, they answered, “We will do everything the Lord has said...” (Ex 19:5-8). We will be a holy people!

TALK ABOUT 1. God has no favorites __ True __ False? **2.** Why did God choose Israel (Deut 7:6-8)? **3.** What covenant promise did God give to

Abraham? **4.** Was the 'seed' or offspring God promised Abraham a special person (Gal 3:16)? **5.** When did God give Moses the law (Ex 19)? **6.** What command did Jesus give to His disciples and to us (Matt 28:19-20)?

GOD BLESSED THE NATION OF ISRAEL

God thought of the faithful in Israel as "the first fruits of His harvest," the first of all those who would come into His kingdom (Jer 2:3). God commanded His people to bring the first sheaf of the harvest and offer it to Him (Lev 23:9-14).

The first sheaf was a token of the full harvest that would follow. God would gather a 'harvest' from Israel. He would also reach out to other peoples and include them in the 'harvest.'

The nation of Israel had all the privileges of a special people, all the care of a special planting of a precious vine (Isa 5:1-7).

Jesus Christ began His ministry by preaching the gospel to "the Jew first" and then to the Gentiles (Rom 1:16). Jesus sent the disciples first to Jewish homes and villages (Matt 10:5-6). Paul said all the blessings of the gospel came to the Jews first. He lists some of the advantages God had given to the Jewish race (Romans 9:3-5):

"Theirs is the adoption of sons (and daughters)..."

"Theirs (is) the divine glory..." of His presence

"Theirs (are) the covenants..." given to their ancestors

Theirs "the receiving of the law..." given to Moses

Theirs "the temple worship and the promises..."

"Theirs (are) the patriarchs" and their testimony

And "from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all..." born a descendent (son) of David.

"They have been entrusted with the...words of God" (Rom 3:2).

THE ADOPTION AS SONS

Adoption is a New Testament word used by Paul who took the thought from God's word concerning Israel of old (Ex 4:22). The thought is of a slave being adopted into a family (Gal 4:5). This gave the 'son' special privileges and made him an heir. This adoption was external and physical.

God chose to adopt the people of Israel because He loved them and wanted to have fellowship with them (Eph 1:4). They were a type or picture of the Christian Church to whom Paul was writing.

The adopted sons of Israel were sealed or 'marked' for God by circumcision (Gen 17:10-14). Paul applies the physical mark of circumcision to the believers who are 'marked' by God's Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). They are alive by the Spirit and led by the Spirit (Rom 8: 14-15).

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). He died for your sins. Now He waits for you to confess, repent and turn away from sin. Then you can claim His promise: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. Paul said "all Israel will be saved." How will the Jews be saved (Acts 17:12; John 14:6)? **2.** When Jesus comes again there will be no more opportunity for men and women to be saved __ True -_ False?

WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

Believers are responsible to witness to their Jewish friends and neighbors. They are precious in God's sight and He wants them to come into His Kingdom now. Each generation is responsible for its own generation. We witness and serve the Lord as if our generation was the last.

We do not have to go to a foreign mission field to reach the Jews with the gospel message. They are at our very door. While many Jews have gone back to Israel, many more remain in the countries of their adoption. America is home to more Jews than the nation of Israel and I believe it will remain that way.

An increase in anti-Jewish feeling and violence in their homeland has made many Jews feel alone and without hope. In some countries they are declining in number. They feel vulnerable to the pressures of this world system. Pray for the Jews you know and reach out to them in love. Pray for peace in Israel (Psa 122:6-9).

TALK ABOUT 1. What was Jesus' last command (Matt 28:19-20)? **2.** How are you obeying Christ's command? **3.** Do you have Jewish friends or neighbors? **4.** Do you pray for the peace of Jerusalem?

JESUS SAID, "BE READY"

When the Master of the house rises up and closes the door to Heaven, no more can go in. Jesus told His listeners, over and over again, to watch and be ready for His Second Coming (Matt 24:42; 1 Thess 4:13-18). At His Second Coming all the saved ones from all nations and languages will be gathered in the New Jerusalem for the great "wedding supper" to be given by the King (Rev 7:9; 19:7). His coming will be as sudden and as bright as the lightning, "every eye will see Him" and no man will have time to change his mind or get ready (Rev 1:7; Matt 24:30-31; 25:1-13). At that moment God will close the door to heaven.

Then Jesus Christ will reign over His Kingdom as King of kings and Lord of lords forever. Those who love Him will inherit that Kingdom in the fullest sense as they take final possession of all the dignity and honor and blessing that heaven affords.

“God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable,” they cannot be changed by man. If it is His purpose to use the Jew’s rejection of Christ for the benefit and salvation of Gentiles, it is His right to do so. He is not unjust. We must praise Him for His wisdom and grace.

When Paul thought about this he exclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Rom 11:33; Isa 55:8-9).

First God sent out His revelation through the Old Covenant and the nation of Israel. Then He sent His witnesses out with the gospel message. Christ brought in a New Covenant and sealed it with His own blood (Luke 22:19-22). Many Jews believed and were saved, but many remained under God’s wrath (John 3:36).

“As for the Gentiles, the present is a reversal of the past (today is the day of God’s favor for the Gentile), so for the Jew the future will be a reversal of the present” (International Bible Commentary, pp. 1338).

Paul concluded, “Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together in one body, and sharers...in the promise in Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:6).

ALL THE WORLD MUST HEAR THE GOSPEL

Paul believed that men had to hear the gospel to be saved. This was the driving force behind his world-wide preaching of the gospel (Rom 10:10-15).

Paul said "a remnant of Israel was being saved," but one day the "full measure" of Jews would come into God's Kingdom. The “full measure” being known only to God. This will be a second stage in God's dealings with Israel.

F.F. Bruce concludes, "all Israel means the Jews as a collective whole, not the arithmetical of all individual Jews" (IBC, p. 1338). This could only refer to the Jews living on the earth in these last days. We must conclude with Paul that "Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). The Jew’s opportunity to be 'saved' is during this day of grace!

"Saved" in this context must mean born again by the Spirit of God as it does in Rom 11:11 and 11:14. Paul is not addressing the question of a political future for 'converted' or a restored nation of Israel.

One commentator wrote, "Now (as) the Gentile Christian has passed from rebellion to pardon (Rom 11:30:); so would the Jew....Now (as) the Jew is serving the Gentile as the means of God's pardoning the latter; so the Gentile is to serve the Jew as a means of pardoning Jews" (Rom 1:22-32).

That seems very confusing. The Bible insists that there is only one way for both Jew and Gentile to come to Christ and that is by faith. Whoever you are, there is only one way to God the Father. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

If you are seeking God’s favor in any other way, stop!

Adoption in this sense was not only a past action, but also a future salvation: “We who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan...as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). So “adoption” for the believer means to be delivered from the past bondage, to a new life in Christ. It describes a past act on God’s part and the beginning of a process of becoming a sanctified son of God (John 1:12).

TALK ABOUT 1. What was the meaning of the “first fruits” offering (Lev 23:9-14)? **2.** What advantages did the Jewish people have (Rom 9:3-5).

THEIRS IS THE SHINING BRIGHTNESS

Paul wrote, “theirs is the divine glory,” again referring to God’s presence with the people of Israel in the Old Testament setting of the Exodus. God demonstrated His presence among His people in unique ways. His glory “filled the tabernacle” that Moses had set up (Ex 40:34-35). God’s Glory was His presence among the people.

God’s presence went with the people as they walked through the desert. The Angel of the Lord appeared to them as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night (Ex 24:16; 29:43).

Because Israel sinned against the Lord and broke His covenant, God’s Glory left the Tabernacle and its sacred furnishings fell into the hands of Israel’s enemies (1 Sam 5:1).

King David’s son, Solomon, built a wonderful temple and dedicated it to God. His prayer of dedication is recorded (2 Chronicles 6:12-42). When Solomon stopped praying, “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the Glory of the Lord filled the temple,” so that the priests could not enter the temple (2 Chron 7:1-2).

Because the people did not honor the temple or worship the Lord God as He commanded, their enemies destroyed the temple and carried the people (Israelites) into captivity (2 Kings 24:1-4). All these things happened to them because “they exchanged their Glory (the Lord Himself) for an image of a bull which eats grass” (Psa 106:20; Jer 2:11).

THEIRS ARE THE COVENANTS

Paul spoke of the Old Covenant God made with Abraham (Gen 13: 15-16). A covenant is like an agreement. God promised to bless Abraham and his family if Abraham obeyed His commands. Later the same covenant was renewed to Abraham’s descendants and its meaning was made larger.

At Sinai God expressed the covenant as a relationship He desired to have with the people of Israel and with all those who had the same faith as Abraham (Ex 19:5-6).

The apostles preached the same ‘gospel’ to the Jews first, as Jesus commanded (Matt 10:5-6). Many Jews believed and came into the Kingdom of God (Acts 4:4; 20:21). A greater number of Jews did not believe Jesus

Christ was the promised Messiah. They stumbled over the 'cornerstone' (Rom 9:33).

God said this of the Jews, "All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people (Rom 10:21; Isa 65:2). They could have enjoyed all the blessings of God's covenant, but they rejected it.

Peter wrote to believers, "As you come to Him (Jesus Christ), the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 2:4-5).

TALK ABOUT 1. What is a covenant? **2.** Who did God make covenant with at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:8-9)? **3.** God commanded the people of Israel to live holy lives. Does God command Christians to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16)? **4.** Israel exchanged their **G**.....for worthless idols (Jer 2:11). Who was Israel's Glory?

GOD GAVE THE LAW AT MOUNT SINAI

Israel was privileged to receive God's perfect law. God gave Moses the Law while the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai. The Law touched every part of their lives. It guided the nation to live lives that pleased God. The Law came with power and great glory (Ex 34:5-8). It was a great privilege to have the law to prepare them for full fellowship with their God.

The law was not a means of earning merit, but a pattern for life. God gave His people this pattern to teach them how to live to please Him.

The Law also spoke of "the alien within your gates" (Ex 20:10). God told the Jews to take in and care for Gentiles who lived among them. .

Paul wrote, "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, righteous and good" (Rom 7:12).

No man could keep the Law. So the Law pointed to man's sin and showed that a man's heart was "deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer 17:9). Only God can give a man a new heart and a new Spirit!

The Jewish Scriptures which contained "the law and the prophets" were not written for Jews only, or even especially for Israel. Paul said the truth contained in the Scriptures was for believers in the present age (1 Cor 9:9-10; 1-11).

TEMPLE WORSHIP AND SACRIFICE

God gave Moses the plan for the tabernacle and directions for the priests who served at the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a model of God working with His people to bring them to final glory. It was a picture of how God would fulfill the promise made to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15).

Jesus said the Kingdom would be taken from them and given to "a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt 21:43). God's people produce "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" which pleases the Father (Phil 1:11).

The Jews were not fruitful in using their privileges (Rom 9:4). They opposed the gospel and lost their special privileges. Other tenants took over God's vineyard. By the second century the Church was made up of mostly Gentile believers and it has continued to be so to this day.

TRUE SONS OF ABRAHAM

The new Gentile shoots flourished in the Olive tree. They bore fruit that pleased God. Some Jewish branches remained to be strengthened in their faith and new ones were added (Acts 6:7), but they were few in number. This caused Paul to quote Isaiah's words, "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Rom 9:27).

Paul was careful to distinguish between the true sons of Abraham – the Israel of God – and the nation of Israel. He said, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel...it is not the natural children (of Abraham) that are God's children" but those who come by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 9:6-8; 10:16).

When men reject Christ their hearts become dark. Paul said a veil covered the hearts of the Jewish nation (2 Cor 3:14-15). God told His prophet that this would happen (Isa 6:9-10). This is a judgment that comes on all who refuse the gospel; it is particularly true of Israel.

Praise God, some receive the Messiah Christ and are saved. God said those that seek him with their whole heart will find Him. They come one by one while the nation as a whole goes its own way.

TALK ABOUT 1. What is the Christian Church? **2.** God sent Paul to preach to his fellow Jews __ True __ False (Acts 9:15-16)? **3.** How did the Jews respond to the gospel? **4.** Was Paul disappointed? Why? (Rom 9:21).

ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

Paul made a bold statement. He seemed to reverse himself when he said, "Israel (the nation) has received a hardening (of the heart) in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in (to the Church). And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26).

What did Paul mean? There are many suggestions: **1.** This turning to the Lord happened after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. At that time many Jews believed. **2.** At Christ's second coming, Jews who are still alive will believe in Him. **3.** Jews coming to Christ in the last days will be like a resurrection. **4.** Paul meant the Christian Church, the Israel of God (Gal 6:16).

"All Israel" could mean all Jews who are born again by the Spirit of God and not the number.

God the same way? Who or what is the way (John 14:6)? **3.** Were many Jews saved when Paul preached? **4.** What did Paul say his fellow Jews (Rom 9:2-3)? **5.** Is it easier for a wise person to believe in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:20-28)?

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Olive tree in Paul's discourse is the Christian Church, the Israel of God. It is rooted in Christ and draws its "nourishing sap" from the root. Christ is the root, Men and women of faith are the branches. Jesus said, "My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch... that bears no fruit (John 15:1-7). The Olive grower (the gardener) does not cut off the good branches. But he carefully prunes them to make them bear even more fruit.

There was always a 'remnant' of Jews who had faith in God and lived to please Him. They were the natural branches. There are only a few Jewish branches in the Olive tree because not many Jews received Christ.

This made Paul very sad. He said he was willing to be "cut off" from the Olive tree, if it would bring his brothers to faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 9:3). To be cut off from Christ, the root and substance of the Olive tree, means to perish in sin.

Paul thought his brother Jews would be envious of the Gentile believers. Jesus said even the harlots were pressing into the Kingdom of God ahead of the Jewish leaders. The great prophet Isaiah said, "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me..." But concerning Israel he (God) says, "All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Rom 10:19-21).

When Isaiah thought of his own people he cried out, "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Isa 10:22-23; Rom 9:27). This was Paul's conclusion.

GOD CALLS TO ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLES

God calls to all nations and peoples. Peoples who were not chosen by Him as Israel was come into His Kingdom. Paul hoped this would move the Jews to envy and make them respond. The Jews were not then and are not now being moved to envy as Paul had hoped (Rom 11:14). They hold to their old traditions and still try to keep the Old Covenant rules..

Jesus said some of the worst sinners were bursting into the Kingdom ahead of them (Matt 11:12; 21:31). He spoke many "Woes" against them because they did not bear the fruit of changed lives (Matt 23).

Finally Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "Look, your house is left to you desolate..." (Matt 23:38). Their religion was empty and cold and completely worthless.

Every part of the tabernacle, every animal sacrifice, and every part of the priestly function pointed to God's Son, Jesus Christ, who would die for the sins of the whole world and bring in a New Covenant (John 1:29; Heb 9:11-12).

The law and the tabernacle were but 'shadows' of the good things that were to come in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant which He signed with His own blood (Luke 22:20-22). Jesus Christ was the true High Priest, the perfect sacrifice for sin (John 1:29; Heb 9).

Christ offered Himself as the once-for-all-time sacrifice for all men and women. He brought the gospel which offered the same Kingdom to all men of every tongue, tribe and nation (Joel 2:32; Rev 7:9).

The Glory of God's presence in the tabernacle was a picture of His presence with the Christian Church. The Church is a "spiritual house" in which God dwells by His Spirit (1 Peter 2:5; 1 Cor 3:16). He dwells in the hearts of His people. They, in turn, offer themselves "a living sacrifice" to God (Rom 12:1-2). And they worship Him "offering a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name" (Heb 13:15).

ISRAEL UNDER MOSES

Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt where they had been slaves for 400 years. God spoke to Moses "face to face" and called him "My servant, Moses" (Ex 33:1).

Even so, Moses failed. Moses was a picture of the law and the law failed to save man from his sin. Moses failed to obey God fully or to give Him all the honor and praise (Num 20:12). God did not let Moses enter the Promised Land.

Moses saw beyond the Promised Land to the coming of Israel's Messiah> He told the people, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like unto me from among your own brothers, I will put My words in his mouth ...If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name, I Myself will call him (or her) to account" (Deut 18:17-19).

Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were sad . Their hope that Jesus would lead a crusade against their Roman overlords had been dashed. The Risen Lord explained from the Scriptures "all things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:25-27). He began at Moses' prophecy.

Moses' prophesy pointed to a long line of prophets who would speak for God. But most important, it pointed forward to Jesus Christ.

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Moses? **2.** What did God tell Moses to do in Egypt (Ex 3:7-12)? **3.** At Mount Sinai God gave Israel the.....? **4.** What did Jeremiah say about man's heart (Jer 17:9)? **5.** What can change a man's heart from a stony heart to a soft heart (Ezek 11:19-20)?

ISRAEL AND THE PROPHETS

In the centuries that followed Moses and the giving of the Law, Israel as a nation wandered far away from God. True worship was lost in self-serving and idol worship. The people of Israel became no different to the nations around them. They made God angry. "Time after time He restrained His anger...He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return" (Psa 78:38-39).

God did not stop sending prophets to speak to them. Through the prophet God asked, "What fault did your fathers find in Me, that they strayed so far from Me" (Jer 2:5)? Each prophet warned the nation: "Repent! Turn away from all your offenses...and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? Repent and live" (Ezek 18:30-32).

Jeremiah pointed to their sins: **a)** They forsook the Lord and followed worthless idols (Jer 2:5,12). **b)** They gave honor to their idols and not to the living God (2:6). **c)** They defiled the land God gave them with their wickedness. **d)** They refused God's word spoken by His prophet (Jer 1:19).

The prophets spoke God's message of warning to kings and people, calling on them to turn from their wicked ways and seek the Lord. Through the prophet Jeremiah God said, "You will find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

The people refused to listen to God's warnings and wicked men killed God's prophets (Matt 23:37). King Ahab tried to kill the prophet Elijah, so God hid him. A Gentile woman at Zarephath gave him a room and fed him (1 Kings 17:7-24).

Under kings like David and Solomon, national boundaries were extended and international trade flourished. Israel prospered, but they did not honor God Almighty.

Because of Israel's idolatry, God allowed great world powers to invade the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and take the people captive to foreign lands. All the prophets pointed beyond these calamities to a 'Day of Judgment' when God would overthrow all evil systems of world government and His people, the true Israel of God, would be delivered to eternal bliss.

Israel's sins and our sins are great, but God is very gracious. He has not stopped calling sinners to repent. He has left the way open for men and women to repent of their sins and return to His loving arms. He promises, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you (Isa 66:13).

TALK ABOUT 1. God called Israel the 'first fruits' of His harvest ___ True ___ False? What does this tell us? **2.** Did Israel obey God's laws as they promised (Ex 19:8)? **3.** Jesus calls all men, "Come to Me and find....."? **4.** Who did God send to warn Israel? **5.** What did the prophet say (Jer 17:9)?

among them. These Judaizers said the new believers must keep the law and the traditions of the elders and be circumcised.

Paul replied that a man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. A Christian is not justified by keeping rules, but by faith that produces obedience and good works (Gal 2:16). Physical circumcision became a "circumcision of the heart" (Col 2:11-12).

"A man is not justified by keeping the law," Paul said, "but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:15-16).

All the Old Testament types and symbols were physical. Paul observed, "The spiritual did not come first, but the natural (man), and after that the spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46). The spiritual reality will overtake the physical and replace it.

TALK ABOUT 1. What last command did Jesus give to His followers (Matt 28:19-20)? **2.** Why did Jesus choose twelve disciples? **3.** Why is there "no difference" between one race of people and another (Rom 3:23)?

PAUL AND HIS FELLOW JEWS

Paul was very sad. Only a few Jews received the Messiah and believed the gospel. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom 9:6). All who were born sons of Abraham were not citizens of the Kingdom of God, the true Israel.

Paul repeated what he had said earlier in his letter (Rom 3:23): "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call upon Him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:12-13; Joel 2:32).

THE OLIVE TREE

Paul preached hard to his fellow Jews, but most of them would not listen. Only a handful received Christ the Messiah. They had tried to win God's favor by keeping their traditions and obeying the Law of Moses.

Paul said the Pharisees and teachers of the law were hypocrites. They taught the people, but did not follow their own teaching. Jesus said "Woe to you Pharisees" (Matt 23:13-32).

The Jews were like branches on an Olive Tree. Their showy leaves looked healthy enough, but they did not bear fruit for God. Bible writers used 'fruit' as a picture of lives that pleased God.

Jesus pointed to the barren lives of the Jewish leaders. As He passed a fig tree, He looked for fruit. The tree should have had fruit, but all He found was leaves. Jesus cursed the tree.

God gave the nation privileges and blessings above the other nations. Paul named some of these privileges (Rom 9:4-5).

TALK ABOUT 1. What made Paul sad? **2.** Must Jews and Gentiles come to

Jesus Christ called all men and women to “Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15). The good news was that God’s Kingdom was open to all who would repent and believe the gospel.

Men and women have to make a choice – to believe or not believe that God loves them and wants them to worship Him only.

Jesus made a tender appeal to the house of Israel when He said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Martha answered in the way God wants all men and women to answer: “Yes, Lord...I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

TALK ABOUT 1. The Kingdom of God is open to all who.....? **2.** How does God choose citizens for His Kingdom? **3.** Why must people hear the gospel? **4.** What did Jesus tell Martha (John 11:15-26)? **5.** Do you have resurrection life? How do you know? **6.** What is “abundant life” (John 10:10)?

CHRIST’S LAST GREAT COMMAND

Jesus chose twelve disciples to carry on the work He had begun. This was to preach the Kingdom of God and make disciples of all nations. He had taught them and prepared them to be His witnesses to the whole world (Acts 1:8).

After Jesus rose from the tomb, the eleven disciples and others went to Galilee. When they saw Jesus they worshipped Him, but still some of them doubted, thinking their eyes were playing tricks on them.

Then Jesus said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus did not say, “Go to the Jews first.”

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

God does not distinguish between the sexes or the races of people (Gal 3:28-29). They are all the same in God’s sight.

Paul said, “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (Rom 3:9). The Jew is not above the Gentile, nor male above female for “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23).

The Jews rejected the Messiah and turned away from the gospel, so Paul turned to the Gentiles with the same message (Acts 13:46-47).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote to Gentile believers who were being influenced by some Jews. The Gentile Christians had found a new freedom in the gospel. But Jews who held to the law of Moses had come

EXILES IN BABYLON

Israel had the patriarch’s and a long record of God’s blessing. After the patriarchs, God sent prophet after prophet to call His people back to holy living and true worship, but they refused to listen. Jesus accused the Jews of “killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you...” (Matt 23:37).

The Lord said, “They (Israel) have forsaken My law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed Me or followed My law...Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, ‘I will scatter them among the nations...I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them” (Jer 9:13-16). This happened when Assyria invaded Israel and Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took its people to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1-21).

During this long period of Israel’s history, a remnant of God-fearing people had the same faith as Abraham. They looked for a spiritual kingdom – “a city whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10; Isa 10:22). They stood firm in their faith and worshipped God as He had commanded.

To them God promised, “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place...Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart” (Jer 29:10-13).

God’s kingdom was represented on the earth by this remnant of Jews who returned to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon (Isa 1:9).

The prophet Malachi wrote, “Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard...They will be Mine, says the Lord, in the day when I make up My treasured possession” (Mal 3:16-17).

COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

Paul used the thought of the Jewish remnant leaving Babylon and returning to their own land as a call to the Christians in Corinth to leave their heathen ways and associations and live holy lives, separated and set apart for God (2 Cor 6:17-18).

Paul wrote letters to his fellow Jews. They had been saved by faith in Christ. He delivered them from all that defiled them in their past lives. They were not delivered from Roman rule, but from the power and bondage of sin. They had to guard against taking unholy partners, in marriage or business. and keep themselves “from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

TALK ABOUT 1. Under Solomon’s reign Israel....., but did the people honor God? **2.** In Israel there was always a.....of people who feared the Lord? **3.** Did the Messiah Christ come to Israel only? Or did He come to bless the whole world? How do you know?

ISRAEL IN THE SILENT YEARS

The 400 years between Nehemiah and the birth of Jesus Christ are sometimes called “the silent years.” Scripture is silent and no great prophet rose up among the Jews for 400 years (432-5 BC).

After the Babylonian captivity (586 BC), the land of Israel became a tribute-paying territory hemmed in by larger world empires. The Greeks under Alexander the Great brought the Greek language and culture. Antiochus of Assyria desecrated the temple and tried to destroy the Jewish form of worship. The Roman legions spread law and order and a judicial system, but demanded that all its citizens worship the Emperor. This was a period of turmoil and change and a further decline in morality.

In spite of the turmoil and change, the Jews living at that time gathered the Scriptures. In Alexandria, Egypt, Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into the Greek language. This copy of the Scriptures is known as the Septuagint. In Palestine, the Essenes copied and hid many portions and some whole books of Scripture. These were discovered in caves in 1947. They are called “the Dead Sea Scrolls” because they were found in caves above the Dead Sea valley.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

God promised “a voice” that would herald the coming of Israel’s Messiah (Isa 40:3; Mal 4:5-6). Isaiah said a person would come, “a voice calling ...prepare the way for the Lord, make straight...a highway for our God.” John the Baptist was born and lived to herald the ministry of Jesus Christ He was “the voice” God had promised.

Scripture states, “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law (the Jews), that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal 4:4).

The Bible says, “He came to that which was His own (the Jews), but His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

Jesus preached to His own people. He healed their sicknesses, opened blind eyes and did only good, but they hated Him and handed Him over to be crucified as a common criminal (Luke 23:23-24).

After Jesus rose from the tomb, He explained to His disciples the meaning of the Scriptures. He said of them, “It is written: The Christ will suffer and rise and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations...” (Luke 24:46-47).

TALK ABOUT 1. What were the 400 years before Jesus Christ was born called? **2.** Who came to prepare the way for Jesus Christ? **3.** Where were ancient pieces of the Bible found? **4.** Were they very important?

the Son of God, is the only faith God will accept. We must believe that Jesus Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

Jew and Gentile must believe, because “God has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man (Christ Jesus) He has appointed” (Acts 17:30). He will judge all men, no group or class of men will escape the judgment of God. Those who have faith in Jesus Christ are not condemned (Rom 8:1). They have been pardoned and will not face judgment.

God “now commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). God does not have favorites. “All people, everywhere, must repent and believe the good news of the gospel. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:20). Men and women must “confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts” that Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead to save them from their sins (Rom 10:8-9).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Saul? **2.** What happened to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-13)? **3.** A man is not made ‘just’ or right before God by doing good works, but by.....alone (Gal 2:16)? **4.** God calls all men and women to have faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior?

HOW DOES GOD CHOOSE PEOPLE?

God chooses who will live with Him forever in heaven. He does this by the preaching of the gospel. He chooses men and women while leaving them to freely choose Him. Moses said to the people of Israel, “This day...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...so that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him (Deut 30:19-20). He challenged them to make the right choice.

Both prophet and priest preached the same message of God’s love and grace to Israel, but only a remnant received the message (Heb 3:16-19; 4:2).

Through Noah God appealed to men and women to go into the ark and be saved (Gen 7:1-5; Heb 11:7). Only Noah and his family went into the ark. “By his faith he condemned the world...” Noah made a choice. He chose to believe God. Those who refused to believe perished in the flood.

Through Joshua God appealed to the Israelites to “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel” (Jos 24:23).

Through the prophet Elijah God challenged the people of Israel with the question, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

Ezekiel cried out, “Rid yourself of all offences...and get a new heart... Why will you die, O house of Israel” (Ezek 18:31)?

Samaria “and proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:5-8). God did many miracles in the city. Many were healed and evil spirit left others, so that “there was great joy in the city.” The Spirit of God caught Philip away, but a great harvest of souls had begun in Samaria.

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them” (Acts 8:14-25). Peter and John followed up on Philip’s ministry.

God sent Philip to an Ethiopian official, another Gentile, to explain the gospel to him (Acts 8:26-49). He repented and believed and Philip baptized him. The official took the message of Christ back to his own people – another proof that God was seeking out Gentiles for His Kingdom.

SAUL (PAUL), THE PHARISEE

All the leaders of Israel opposed Jesus and His message. John wrote, “He (Jesus Christ) came to...His own (the Jews), but His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

Saul, too, hated Christians. He was a Pharisee. He was taught by one of the best lawyers in Jerusalem and brought up to obey God’s law. Saul was zealous for God without knowing God’s forgiveness. Saul hated those who followed “the Way,” which was all Christians.

Saul went to Damascus to persecute the Christian there. As he traveled, a bright light blinded Saul and he fell to the ground. A voice spoke to him and said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

“Who are You, Lord?” Saul answered.

Jesus Christ answered Saul, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...go into the city and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:1-6).

In Damascus Saul met a godly man named Ananias. God had told Ananias, “This man (Saul) is a chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles...” Paul took the message of the gospel to most of the countries in the Middle East.

TALK ABOUT 1. What did the Jews think of the Samaritans? **2.** Did Jesus despise them? How do you know (John 4:1-24)? **3.** Who went to Samaria to preach the gospel (Acts 8:5-8)? **4.** Who took the gospel to the Middle East countries? **5.** Where did Saul, the Pharisee, meet Jesus Christ (Act 9:1-15)?

GOD CHOOSES WHOM HE WILL

“Abraham believed the Lord, and He (God) credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Abraham’s faith was unique and set an example for all to follow. His faith looked forward to the Redeemer God had promised from the beginning (Rom 4:18-25).

God calls men and women to have a faith like Abraham’s. He called all Israel to have this same faith in the coming Messiah. Faith in Jesus Christ,

ISRAEL REJECTED THEIR MESSIAH

From the very beginning, God promised a person who would deliver sinful man from Satan’s power. When Adam and Eve sinned God promised a ‘seed of the woman (Eve)’ who would crush Satan’s head (the head means his authority and power, Gen 3:15). The ‘seed’ pointed to a Redeemer.

The Old Testament pictures Christ, the Messiah of Israel, in symbol and prophesy. Every prophet shared some truth about the Redeemer who would come to deliver Israel and forgive the sins of everyone who “called on the name of the Lord” (Joel 2:32). He would come not for Israel only. Israel’s Messiah would come to die for the sins of the whole world (Isa 56:7; John 1:29).

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, lived among men and died on the cross. Over 300 specific prophecies were fulfilled in His birth, life and death. Yet the Pharisees and most of the Jewish people failed to receive their Messiah (Luke 2:30-32). Instead they looked for a national hero who would deliver them from Roman rule. Even Christ’s disciples made this mistake (Acts 1:6). The Jews still look for a Messiah to come and deliver them from their enemies.

A NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST

So far, the nation of Israel has failed to fulfill God’s purpose: “to bring glory and honor to His name” in all the earth (Isa 49:3). Because Israel failed to love the Lord God and worship Him only (Deut 6:5), God made a new beginning in Christ. He did not set the Jews aside, but came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, to live among them and call them back to faith (John 1:14).

God promised all the world a New Covenant. He told His prophet Jeremiah that He would replace the old system of law with a new order (Jer 31:33). The New Covenant would take the place of the Old Covenant and make it obsolete (Heb 8:13). God promised, “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” God’s promise is fulfilled when men and women put their faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit fills their lives and teaches them to obey the “royal law of love” (James 2:8).

Jesus Christ signed the New Covenant with His own blood (Luke 22:19-22). When He died, the Old Covenant with all its rules and regulations became obsolete and passed into history (Heb 8:13). Jesus came as “a light for the Gentiles,” and “to bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

God also promised: “I will pour out My Spirit on all people... Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days...” (Joel 2:28-29). Peter said this miraculous event took place at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). That day, in an upper room, the Holy Spirit came on both men and women. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4).

Under the Old Covenant the Spirit of God came on certain people at certain times. He anointed them for special service. The Old Covenant demanded that men obey God's law (Deut 11:27). Man failed to do this, so the Covenant condemned him (Rom 6:23). It pronounced judgment on the sinner and failed to help him toward obedience (Deut 4:1; Gal 3:21).

Under the New Covenant the Holy Spirit gives a new birth to all who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin (John 3:5,8). The Holy Spirit gives us power to witness and live holy lives. God does everything to sanctify us!

Paul told the Christians at Colosse, "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to religious festivals, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day (all vestiges of the Old Covenant). These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col 2:16-17).

TALK ABOUT 1. Did the nation of Israel keep God's Covenant? **2.** What did they turn to and worship? **3.** What did God say about their sins (Jer 30:12-13)? **4.** Was there any hope for them (Jer 29:13-14)? **5.** Why did God replace the Old Covenant with a new one? **6.** Who came to be "a light to the Gentiles?"

CHRIST'S MESSAGE WAS NOT NEW

Christ's message to the Jews of His day was not new, but more urgent. He said, "The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus spent three years telling the Jewish people this "good news," that God would forgive their sins and receive their worship through faith in Him. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned (for his sins) ..." (John 5:24). He also said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus did not try to turn the Jewish people back to their heritage. They had a rich heritage, as Paul noted (Rom 9:4-5). They had a great advantage over the heathen Gentiles (Rom 3:1-2). Peter spoke of this heritage on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-26). Other apostles drew on this heritage when they preached and so did Paul. But heritage is not enough!

The Pharisees said, "We have Abraham as our father ...we are his descendants" (John 8:33, 39). Jesus answered them, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill Me" (John 8:39-40).

Because Jesus made Himself equal with God, the Jews tried to kill Him. "Not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

JESUS SENT OUT WITNESSES

After He rose from the dead, Jesus met His disciples in Galilee and said to them, "go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt 28:19 NIV).

Jesus had trained twelve disciples to be His witnesses. After He rose from the dead He told them, "stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus did not say "Preach the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea before you go to Samaria and beyond." The order indicated a natural spread of the message from the city of Jerusalem where the witnesses lived outward to the provinces.

Jesus, Himself, showed the way. He preached to His own people first. Then He went to the Gentiles. He went to Gadara and cast a legion of demons out of a man (Luke 8:26-39). He spoke to the woman of Tyre and healed her sick daughter (Mark 7:24-30). All these people were Gentiles.

The disciples waited in Jerusalem. Ten days later the Holy Spirit came upon them. They went out into the streets of Jerusalem to tell the wonders of salvation in Jesus Christ. God saw to it that "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" heard the message (Acts 2:5-12). Gentiles heard the message and took it back to their own countries.

Under the New Covenant God has commanded all men and women of faith to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Matt 28:19 KJV). Jesus said the gospel must be preached to "all nations" before He comes again to gather His people (Matt 24:14).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did Jesus choose twelve disciples? **2.** What was the "good news" that Jesus preached (Mark 1:15)? **3.** Did He preach only to Jews? Why not? **4.** Are you one of Jesus' disciples? Would you like to be?

TO SAMARIA AND ALL THE WORLD

Jesus said to His disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He named Jerusalem and Judea first. They would begin at home and, as the Christian Church grew, they would take the gospel to the whole world.

The Samaritans were a mixed race who were imported from many lands after Assyria invaded their land (2 Kings 17:24). They did not worship as the Jews did.

The Jews looked down on the Samaritans and thought of them as inferior. They would not speak to a Samaritan or travel through that part of the country where the Samaritans lived.

Jesus made a special journey through Samaria and spoke to a woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-24). Philip, a disciple of Jesus, went to the city of