

The Oracles of God

“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?
Much every way: **chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.**”
Romans 3:1-2

Introduction:

1. Once upon a time, in faraway Greece, the ancient Mediterranean world traveled to Delphi for wisdom.
 - a. Around 800 B.C. the city of Delphi gave itself to the worship of Apollo, the national god of Greece.
 - b. In the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, the high priestesses served as the oracle of wisdom to the world.
 - c. She and her successors were called the ***Oracle of Delphi***, for she was the source of divine wisdom.
 - d. Ancient Greeks believed Delphi the center of the world, marked by a stone monument – of a navel.
 - e. The adoration and respect for these high priestesses continued for over 1000 years until 400 A.D.
 - f. As Greek religion has it, these women obtained their wisdom from Apollo’s spirit filling them.
 - g. These high priestesses were the most powerful women of the classical world of Greece and Rome.
 - h. This oracle, or the revelation of God, is one of the best-documented religious institutions of Greece.
 - i. Tradition says they spoke gibberish in a frenzied state that shortened life, interpreted by priests.
 - j. Since the Greeks wrote much about this oracle, there are all kinds of details for those interested.
 - k. The temple at Delphi survived until 390 A.D. when the Roman emperor Theodosius I silenced the oracle forever by destroying the temple and most other things in Delphi connected to paganism.
 - l. It is now only archeological ruins with a small town built nearby that has citizens and commerce.
 - m. Greece is now one of the jokes of Europe, showing her great lack of wisdom in finance, war, etc.
 - n. For further information about the Oracle of Delphi or Greek Pythia ... <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythia>.
2. We are in the middle of a sermon series about the only right worldview, but this passage serves it well.
 - a. Think axiom #2 – *God gave scripture ...* axiom #4 – *Scripture is absolute truth*. Do you value it?
 - b. The goal and content of this lesson is the advantage, benefit, and leverage by God for His children.
 - c. Jehovah gave us His perfect wisdom in *The Oracles of God*, the scriptures, the Bible (“the books”).

The Context

- A. Romans is the gospel of God (Rom 1:1). It has more about salvation than any epistle.
- B. Paul began as any right discussion of salvation should – with man’s situation under sin.
 1. After an introduction (1:1-15), he proved all men condemned under sin (1:16 – 3:20).
 2. He began by condemning the Gentiles for their rejection of creation truth (1:18-32).
 3. He reproved Jews in chapter two, mocking hope in circumcision (2:1,17,24,28-29).
 4. Here in chapter three he answered four questions he knew Jews would raise (3:1-8).
 5. Then he applied the scriptures to the Jews and proved their condemnation (3:9-20).
- C. By this blast against them (2:1 – 3:20), Jews would reject Paul for denying God’s favor.
 1. Circumcision had indeed been a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham and children.
 2. But Paul had mocked the Jews for their guilt and denounced outward circumcision.
 3. The obvious rebuttal question would be – *do Israelites have no national privileges?*
 4. Paul used the sharp rhetorical tool of raising hearers’ objections and answering them.
- D. The overall context of the New Testament shows many Jews trusting in their nationality.
 1. John Baptist immediately encountered Pharisees trusting in Abraham (Matt 3:7-10).
 2. Jesus met the same Jewish mentality and false confidence in Abraham (Jn 8:33-45).
 3. Paul used much of Romans/Philippians and all of Galatians/Hebrews against them.

- E. Before leaving the context, do you understand how the next questions and answers fit?
1. Was there no benefit? ... no profit? ... no advantage? ... no leverage? ... for Jews?
 2. Is there any ... benefit? ... profit? ... advantage? ... leverage? ... for us Christians?

The Text

What advantage then hath the Jew?

- A. The first and strong rebuttal question against Paul was from Israel's standing with God.
1. The Jews knew God had chosen Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and they through them.
 2. If Paul condemned Jews and Gentiles together, then what benefit was there for Jews?
- B. The Jews had a national heritage of patriarchs, exodus from Egypt, Canaan, temple, etc.
1. They knew God had set the boundaries of all nations in regard to them (Deut 32:8).
 2. They knew God had given them Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, etc.
 3. They knew God had given them a priesthood, tabernacle, temple, and His prophets.
- C. If they were on their way to hell just like the Gentiles, was Paul denying God's favor?
1. The Jews believed unconditional earthly preeminence and eternal life for being Jews.
 2. They had unconditional trust once in their temple by this foolish heresy (Jer 7:1-15).
- D. As God's people, nation, and church ... what benefit did they have without eternal life?

Or what profit is there of circumcision?

- A. In Genesis 17 God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision for His promised blessings.
1. The Jews kept this ritual going for nearly 2000 years. Did Paul count it worthless?
 2. He had just blasted outward circumcision as quite worthless compared to the inward.
 3. The Jews knew circumcision was a very important sign and seal of God's blessings.
- B. This clause is a repetition of the first clause, but focused on the sign of the covenant.
- C. As God's people, nation, and church ... what *profit* did they have without eternal life?

Much every way.

- A. Paul's first response is that a circumcised Jew had divine benefits in every possible way.
1. Instead of reasoning foolishly that being a Jew was nothing, he exalted it very high.
 2. The Jews, compared to any other nation, were better off in every blessing possible.
 3. We must be willing to admit any agreement or unity we have with those in error.
 4. Paul granted them blessing in *every way* while withholding *the way* they presumed.
 5. Jews have no more advantage or profit than Gentiles when it comes to justification.
- B. Paul knew the truth about Jews – they had every earthly advantage possible for a people.
1. God protected and prospered their fathers very much (Gen 13:2; 26:12-14; 30:43).
 2. God raised up Moses to overthrow Egypt and bring Israel out with Egypt's wealth.
 3. God raised up Joshua to take Canaan of milk and honey with infrastructure intact.
 4. God raised up judges to deliver them from their enemies after repeated disobedience.
 5. God gave them David to be their king and expanded their borders until very great.
 6. God gave them His worship, with His priesthood, with sanctifying animal sacrifices.
 7. God had revealed Himself and monotheistic worship to them unlike any other nation.

8. God delighted in Israel as the apple of His eye and favored them over other nations.
 9. God willingly sacrificed other nations and people for them, as He said (Is 43:1-7).
 10. God purposed to send His Redeemer through them to bless all the Gentiles nations.
- C. They did not have any advantage for justification – they were condemned like Gentiles.

Chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

- A. Out of all benefits, blessings, advantages, and profit Israel had, Paul exalted one highest.
1. When we come on inspired wisdom like this, we should look for it with great zeal.
 2. If all the blessings of Israel had one chief advantage for their profit, can we have it?
- B. The great benefit Jews had over other peoples was God giving them His divine oracles.
1. Of all angles of God's beneficence to Israel – His oracles was the chief advantage.
 2. Nothing else the Jews enjoyed by national heritage from God could compete with it.
 3. They had God's will written down for them for prosperity in this world and the next.
- C. What are the oracles of God? Exactly what did Paul by the Spirit intend by this phrase?
1. **Oracle.** I. Originally. *Greek and Roman.* The instrumentality, agency, or medium, by which a god was supposed to speak or make known his will.
 2. **Oracle.** II. Transferred. *Jewish or Christian.* A vehicle of divine communication. Jewish holy of holies. High priest's breastplate with Urim and Thummim. A prophet or teacher of the will of God. Divine revelation as in the holy scriptures.
 3. Refer to the Greek's *Oracle of Delphi* briefly summarized in the introduction above.
- D. *Oracle* in the singular occurs 17 times, intending the holy of holies 16 of those 17 times.
1. The 16 times (I Kgs 6:5,16,19-23,31; 7:49; 8:6,8; II Chr 3:16; 4:20; 5:7,9; Ps 28:2).
 2. II Sam 16:23 is excepted – Ahithophel's counsel was compared to divine revelation.
- E. *Oracles* in the plural occurs 4 times, all in the New Testament, intending the scriptures.
1. Stephen used *oracles* for the laws God gave to Israel by Moses (Acts 7:38,53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2); they were *lively oracles* for the life they brought (Deut 32:47; 30:19).
 2. Paul used *oracles* to describe the N.T. gospel the Hebrews had heard (Heb 5:12-14), which can be ascertained by the context before and directly after (Heb 2:1-4; 6:1-3).
 3. Peter used *oracles* to describe content of sermons by His preachers (I Pet 4:11), for no minister has anything to say by himself (II Tim 4:2; 3:16-17; 2:15; I Thess 2:13).
 4. Thus, by context and comparing scriptures, we understand Paul to mean scriptures.
 5. Contrast our plural oracles to Delphi's singular – ours is in plural books – the Bible.
- F. *Oracles* in our text, the chief blessing of God to Israel, is the inspired holy scriptures.
1. They were given to Israel and no other, which is Paul's point here (Ps 147:19-20).
 2. They were for national and personal life by obeying God (Deut 32:47; 30:19; 6:24).
 3. God and Moses knew all other nations would envy Israel for scripture (Deut 4:5-8).
 4. David described scripture often as exceeding other blessings (Ps 19:7-11; 119:111).
 5. Solomon described wisdom of scripture better than all other things (Pr 3:15; 8:11).
 6. We further know it is scripture by Paul applying it to condemn Jews (Rom 3:9-20).

The Lesson

- A. The right worldview says: #2 – *God gave scripture ...* #4 – *Scripture is absolute truth.*
- B. Every man with any idea of who God is (#1) and did (#3), wants God to speak to him.
 - 1. God has spoken by prophets, His Son, and put it in writing for us to savor and shout!
 - 2. We are very blessed with advantage, profit, and leverage over others by the Bible.
 - 3. The Bible we preach is not the words of men but rather of God Himself (I Thes 2:13).
- C. God’s written oracles are superior in every way to frenzied priestesses hallucinating.
 - 1. After 800 years, what did Paul say? Superstition and ignorance (Acts 17:22-31)!
 - 2. When earth is like Delphi, our oracles stand (Is 40:8; Matt 5:18; 24:35; I Pet 1:25).
- D. The oracles of God – a divine library – is very fantastic in breadth, depth, and intimacy.
 - 1. *Breadth* – you cannot think of an aspect of life that the Bible does not clearly address.
 - 2. *Depth* – plumb hell, heaven, heart of man, heart of God, angels’ desire, doctrine, etc.
 - 3. *Intimacy* – God expressed and promised love in fabulous ways beyond imagination.
- E. God chose us for this time to preach and defend His oracles (II Tim 3:1,16-17; 4:1-4).
 - 1. To Israel were *committed* the O.T. oracles of God, but we have the combined library.
 - 2. While others turn to entertainment and fables, let us exalt and promote the Bible.
 - 3. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and God’s truth is only in the Bible.

The Response

- A. Our worldview, no matter how perfectly organized and/or presented, exalts our oracles.
- B. We are Baptists, but first Bible Christians, for we need oracles to know proper baptism.
- C. Do you know the Bible trumps all of man’s vain thoughts (Ps 119:113; 94:11; Is 8:20)?
- D. Do you read it like you should? Searching it daily a little, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11)?
- E. The Bible can be a two-edged sword – it is for prosperity, but condemns if disobeyed.
- F. The Bible cannot profit without obedience. Do not be foolish like the Jews (Jer 7:1-15).
- G. Do you love it like David did, which we have heard and read over and over many times?
- H. Will you teach your children to love it, read it, teach it, expect it, defend it, and so forth?

For Further Study:

- 1. Most Amazing Book Written (slides) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/bible/scripture/most-amazing-book.php>.
- 2. Why I Believe the Bible (apologetics) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/bible/scripture/why-i-believe-the-bible.php>.
- 3. Why I Believe the KJV is God’s Word (slides) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/proving-the-kjv.pdf>.
- 4. How to Read the Bible (slides) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/how-to-read-the-bible.pdf>.
- 5. Daily Devotional for One Chapter a Day ... <https://www.letgodbetruerue.com/reference/daily-devotionals.php>.
- 6. How to Understand the Bible (hermeneutics) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/bible/scripture/knowning-the-scriptures.php>.
- 7. Bring Everything Back to the Bible ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/sermons/scripture/bring-it-back-to-the-bible/sermon.php>.
- 8. Vain Thoughts of Man (slides) ... <http://letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/vain-thoughts.pdf>.
- 9. The Greatest Preaching Service ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/sermons/exposition/preaching-service/sermon.php>.
- 10. Commentary of Proverbs 9:9 ... http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/proverbs/commentaries/09_09.php.
- 11. Commentary of Proverbs 18:1 ... http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/proverbs/commentaries/18_01.php.
- 12. How to Be a Noble Hearer ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/noble-hearers.pdf>.
- 13. Perilous Times Loss of Truth ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/sermons/exposition/perilous-times/sermon.php>.
- 14. Training Table for Children ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/child-training-goals-table.pdf>.
- 15. Bible Study Tools – 2019 (slides) ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/bible-study-tools-slides-05-2019.pdf>.
- 16. The Bible Cannot Profit ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/bible-cannot-profit.pdf>.
- 17. God’s Ransom of Egypt for Israel ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/egypt-for-thy-ransom.pdf>.