

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

How to turn “Greeks” into “Jews”

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In 1959, I turned eight years old. It was a historic year for my homeland of Australia because a famous American evangelist conducted a series of crusades in the large cities of Melbourne and Sydney.

Some commentators claimed this was the closest Australia ever came to revival.¹

In the years following, Australia has not seen such an influential crusade. Later crusades did not seem to match the apparent results of 1959.

Today, when such crusades are conducted, whether in Australia, America or other

1 Piggin, S., *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 154–171, 1996. As quoted by Manley, K., *Shaping the Australia Baptist Movement*, www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org/hic-mnly.htm.

countries, statistics indicate that the small percentage of people who do go forward for first-time commitments seem to fall away or are not incorporated into any church.²

Why was it that, even though the entire Australian society “buzzed” as a result of these 1959 crusades, there seemed to be no lasting major impact on the culture itself? And why has Australia’s culture (and other Western cultures) been continuously declining in regard to Christian morality, despite numerous evangelistic campaigns?

It really comes down to understanding the difference between “Jews” and “Greeks” (using the terms as types).

“Crusades” conducted by Paul and Peter

In 1 Corinthians 1:23 we read the words of the Apostle Paul, “But we preach Christ crucified, to the **Jews a stumblingblock**, and to the **Greeks foolishness.**”

2 McCune, R., *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*, Ambassador International, Greenville, SC, pp. 80–82, 2004.

JEWES



In Acts 2, the Apostle Peter preached a bold message that was primarily directed to Jews (or those familiar with the Jewish religion). The main thrust of his message concerned the death and resurrection of Christ and the need for salvation.

GREEKS



The Scripture records that 3,000 people responded positively to Peter's message. This was a phenomenally successful "crusade."

Now in Acts 17, when Paul preached a similar message concerning the resurrection of Christ to the Greek philosophers, their response indicated that they thought the message was really foolishness.

Why the difference in response?

In Acts 2, Peter was preaching to people (Jews) who, at that time, believed in the God of creation as recorded in the Old Testament.

They understood the meaning of sin because they knew about the Fall of the first human couple in Genesis chapter 3. They also had the Law of Moses, so they knew exactly what God expected of them and how



they fell short. They were not indoctrinated in the evolutionary ideas that the Greeks had developed. (More about that in a moment.) The Word of God had credibility in their eyes and was considered sacred.

The Jews also understood the need for a sacrifice for sin because, after all, according to Acts 2, they were there on that particular day (the day of Pentecost) to sacrifice animals, as they had always done. However, most of the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, so Peter challenged them concerning who Jesus was and what He had done on the Cross.

Here, then, is an important observation to note: the Jews had the foundational knowledge of creation and sin to understand the message of salvation. Peter didn't have to convince his audience that God was Creator or that man had sinned. He could concentrate on the message of the Cross.

Peter, you see, didn't have to establish the credibility of God's Word or convince the Jews about creation (as opposed to naturalistic explanations

of origins or deal with teaching about supposed millions of years—these were not really issues in the Jewish culture at that time).

Evolution in ancient times

Now in Acts 17, Paul was preaching to Greek philosophers. In their culture, they did not have any understanding of the God of creation as the Jews understood. They believed in many gods, and that the gods, like humans, had evolved. The Epicureans, for instance, believed man evolved from the dirt (in fact, they were the atheists of the age).



The Greeks had no understanding of sin or what was necessary to atone for sin. God's Word to the Jews had no credibility in this evolution-based culture. Thus when Paul preached the same basic message Peter gave in Acts 2, the Greeks did not understand—it was “foolishness” to them.

As you read on in Acts 17, it's fascinating to see what Paul tried to do in reaching the Greeks with the gospel. He talked to them about the “unknown God” (referred to on one of the Greek altars), and proceeded to define the true God of creation to them.

Paul also explained that all people were of “one blood” (from one man, Adam), thus laying the foundational history necessary to understand the meaning of the first man Adam's sin and the need for salvation for all of us as Adam's descendants.³ He countered their evolutionary beliefs, thus challenging their entire way of thinking in a very foundational way.

3 For some fascinating reading on what the Bible teaches about the origin of the so-called “races” around the world, and to discover the most effective way to combat racism, read our book *One Blood: The Biblical Answer to Racism*.

Having done this, Paul then again preached the message of Christ and the Resurrection. Although some continued to sneer, others were interested to hear more (their hearts were opened) and some were converted to Christ.

Even though Paul didn't see 3,000 people saved as Peter did, Paul was nonetheless very successful (from a human perspective, knowing it is God who opens people's hearts to the truth as 1 Corinthian 2:14 teaches).

Think about what he had to do: Paul had to first change "Greeks" into "Jews."

In other words, he had to take pagan, evolutionist Greeks and change their whole way of thinking about life and the universe, and then get them to think like Jews concerning the true foundation of history recorded in Genesis.

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"Once the barrier of evolution had been removed, it was so much easier to believe the Bible and receive Christ. I am convinced of the destructive nature of evolution on society and its serious undermining effects on the Bible." — M. P., Scotland
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No wonder only a few were converted at first. Such a change is a dramatic one. Imagine, for example, trying to change an Aborigine from my homeland into an American in regard to his whole way of thinking? Such a change would be extremely difficult, to say the least.

The culture change

Now let's go back to 1959. At that time in Australia's history, it was common for public school students to have prayer (even reciting the Lord's Prayer) at an assembly before the start of the day. In elementary schools, it was also not



uncommon for students to be read a section of the Bible or a Bible “story” before they started the day. On the weekends, many children went to Sunday schools. Then through the week, ministers of religion even visited schools and taught students about the Bible.

I suggest to you that generations ago, even in Australia (which did not have a strong Christian heritage that America had), the culture was somewhat like the “Jews.” Most people knew the basic concepts of the Christian religion concerning creation, sin and the message of salvation. So when an evangelist came and preached the message of the Cross, it was sort of like Peter preaching to the Jews in Acts 2. They had the foundational knowledge to understand the message and responded accordingly.

Now, even though much of the Australian society was like the “Jews” in the sense that many people could understand biblical terms—because of the relative familiarity with the Bible “stories”—I believe these “Jews” were already becoming “Greeks” in regard to their thinking about reality. Fifty years ago, Australia’s public

schools were teaching millions of years and evolutionary ideas. In a low-key way, these schools were subtly undermining the credibility of the Bible's history.

This is one of the reasons that I believe there seems to have been no real lasting Christian impact on the Australian culture, and the culture has progressively become more anti-Christian since then. Underneath it all, Australians still had questions about the validity of the Bible as a whole.

Now today in Australia, saying a prayer during a school assembly or sharing Bible "stories" to start the school day are unheard of. In addition, evolution is also taught as "fact" throughout the education system.

Biblical illiteracy

The last two generations in Australia have had little or no knowledge of the Bible. By and large they have been thoroughly indoctrinated in an atheistic, evolutionary philosophy. Children don't automatically go to Sunday

school or church programs as they used to. Ministers of religion are finding it more and more difficult to conduct programs in schools. And sadly, most church leaders tell their congregations that it's fine to believe in millions of years and/or evolutionary ideas, as long as God is somehow involved.



After years of subtle indoctrination and with an increasing emphasis on rejecting a literal Genesis, Australians basically reject the credibility of the Genesis history, and thus they doubt the reliability of the rest of the Bible.

Whether it's Australia, America, Great Britain or elsewhere, Western societies are no longer made up mainly of "Jews" but are more like the pagan Greeks: increasingly anti-Christian, and holding to a predominantly atheistic, evolutionary secular philosophy.

Indeed, they are probably even worse than Paul's opponents 2,000 years ago. The Greeks at least asked to hear him out; today many secularists try to suppress Christian teachings. In our modern time, there is a remnant of "Jews" who still have an understanding of Christian terminology, but this group is quickly becoming a smaller and smaller minority.

Today's "Greeks" do not have the foundational knowledge to fully understand the gospel. They have been led to believe that the Bible is not a credible book; its history in Genesis (creation

in six days and a global Flood) is not seen to be true because so many people have been indoctrinated to believe in millions of years and evolution. Thus when an evangelist today preaches the message of the Cross, like the Greeks in Acts 17, it is foolishness to them.

How can we reach today's "Greeks" then?

As Paul understood, the "Greeks" need to be turned into "Jews." Their wrong foundation concerning evolution and millions of years needs to be changed to one of understanding and believing that the Bible's account of creation and the Fall of man is true (i.e., that man is a sinner).

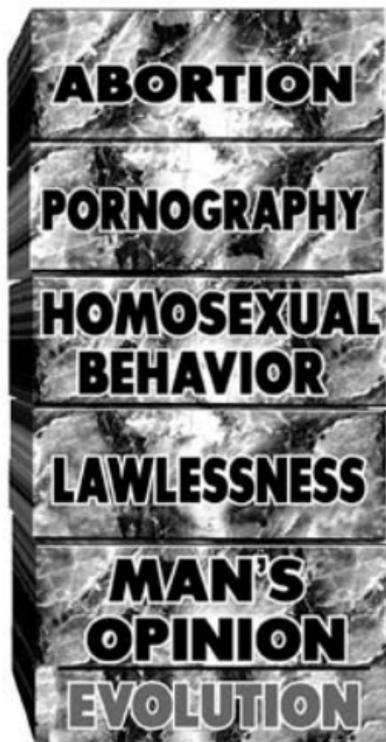
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"Several years ago, your ministry played an important role in bringing me to the God and Savior of the Bible. If I was going to believe in the God of the Bible, it had to be proven to me that the Scriptures were not in error."

— V. B., *New York*

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Once they have this different foundation, these “Greeks” can better understand the message of Christ and, we pray, respond accordingly and receive Christ. Sadly, most Christian leaders in recent decades didn’t realize this shift. This approach of trying to “turn Greeks into Jews” to make people more open to the gospel message really should have been used even back in 1959 and before.



In the 1900s, the seeds of “Greek” thinking were already infiltrating the minds of people within and without the Christian church. The church by and large was not giving answers in dealing with evolutionary ideas and to establish the credibility of the Bible.

This could have made a real difference in the way people saw the Bible. If they had understood that it wasn’t just a book of spiritual and moral issues but a book of history that could really be trusted, then they would have been more likely to trust the gospel based in that history.

When you compare this situation in Australia to the condition of the United States or Great Britain, it is easy to see a similar set of circumstances. Generations ago, their cultures were like the “Jews.” The Bible, prayer, creation, etc. were a part of everyday life in public (government-run) schools—so most people were “Jews” in much of their thinking about spiritual matters.

But the seeds of “Greek” thinking were also being laid down subtly through the education

system. Even in 1925, public school students in America were sadly being taught that the Caucasians were the “highest race” and that the earth was millions of years old—by a textbook that also promoted so-called “mercy killing.”⁴

Generations in the US (and in other countries) have now come through an education system that is basically devoid of the knowledge of God. In fact, Christianity is often taught *against* or relegated to mere personal belief instead of objective truth about world history. The Bible, prayer and creation have basically been thrown out of the public education system. Students by and large are taught evolution as fact. The Bible is not a credible book in the eyes of most of these students. They are “Greeks.”

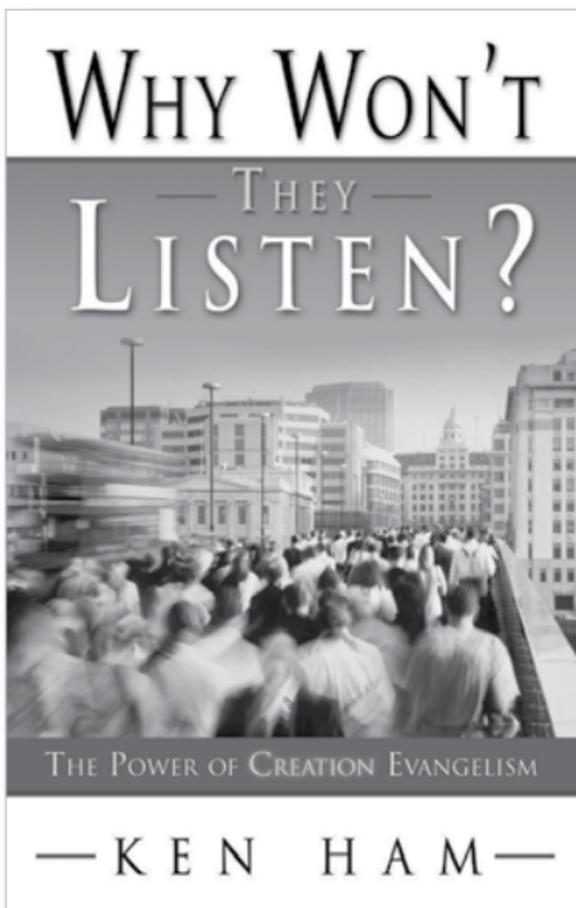
If we want to evangelize the once-Christianized Western world today, there needs to be an understanding that the cultures have become Greek-like. The message will not be understood by such people until they can be changed from “Greeks” into “Jews.”

4 Hunter, G. W., *A Civic Biology Presented in Problems*, American Book Company, New York, p. 196, 1914.

The culture today needs the answers from science and the Bible to counter evolutionary and “millions of years” teaching so that the literal history of Genesis 1–11 is established—thus giving credibility to the gospel (in fact, *all* Christian doctrine) that is founded in this history. Indeed, such “creation evangelism” is a part of the beginning of the process of changing “Greeks” into “Jews” so they will better understand the gospel message and respond to it.

Much more about how to effectively evangelize our secular, “evolutionized” world (including practical advice) can be found in our book *Why Won't They Listen?* (right)

“There are three people at my job who have come to the Lord as a direct result of hearing the creation message. ‘Creation evangelism’ is essential to show that God’s Word *IS* the truth.” —J. D., Oregon



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