

Sunday August 5th 2018
The Word of God
A Survey of the Bible – Part 11A
'Men and Brethren, What Shall We Do?'

1). Mt 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Mt 15:24 *But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

We have seen in our previous weeks of study that God the Father had sent His Son to the nation of Israel with a very specific message – 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand' - this was a message concerning repentance from centuries of unfaithfulness and disobedience and turning back to the God of their fathers all with a view to receiving the heavenly realm of the Kingdom, replacing Satan and his angels as the rulers over the Gentile nations of the earth, as was promised to Abraham and his descendants - Ge 22:17 *"blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies."*

a). This then was a message and an offer that could only be received by those in possession of eternal life, those who were the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob who, at the time of the Lord's first advent, would be exclusively the nation of Israel.

b). And, as we have also seen, the Messenger and His message were rejected by the nation resulting in the crucifixion of the One born 'the King of the Jews'.

c). But then, this was not unexpected as the Lord's death, burial and resurrection had already been foretold throughout the OT scriptures – Lu 24:25 *Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the*

Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The Lord's crucifixion though did not bring these events to a close, but rather set in motion the next phase in the outworking of God's eternal purpose.

2). Now, prior to the Lord's crucifixion He had given specific instructions to those He sent out to the Jewish people with the message of the Kingdom of the Heavens - Mt 10:5 ¶ *These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

Those sent, beginning here with the 12 and eventually including the 70, were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel – they were ‘not to go into the way of the Gentiles’ and they were ‘not to enter a city of the Samaritans’.

a). And quite simply this is because the message could only be received by the Jewish people alone.

b). However, following the Lord's resurrection the instructions the Lord gave His disciples changed - Mt 28:18 *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go [Lit. 'having gone'] therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

These verses recorded in Matthew provide one facet of what has come to be called, ‘the great commission’. And there are other facets to this commission found in Mark, Luke and Acts which should be put together with this one to make the whole.

c). And this is how the commission is presented in Mark's Gospel – Mr 16:15 *And He said to them, "Go [Lit. 'having gone'] into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything*

deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

d). And this is what's recorded in Luke - Lu 24:46 *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 "And you are witnesses of these things. 49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."*

e). And from the Book of Acts – Ac 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

And here we see that having received 'power' when the Holy Spirit would come upon them, the promise of the Father, the disciples were to be witnesses to the Christ in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth – a distinct departure from the instructions given to them before the Lord's crucifixion. So, why would this be and what are we to learn concerning this 'commission'?

f). Well, to begin with let's look at what the Lord continued to teach with respect to this commissioning of His disciples, seen in the opening verses of Acts - Ac 1:1 ¶ *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

As we have had some good reason in past weeks for placing John's Gospel first in the Gospels because of its parallel with Genesis, there is an equally strong argument for placing Luke's Gospel last, as the Book of Acts, also written by Luke, picks up exactly where his Gospel ends and would therefore provide excellent continuity moving from the Gospels to the Book of Acts.

g). But for now, let's note the end of v3 – over a period of 40 days, a complete period of time, He spoke to them 'of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God'. And this can only be the same 'Kingdom of God' seen

throughout the Gospel accounts, the Kingdom of the Heavens – in effect then the Lord continued to teach the subject taught before His crucifixion after His crucifixion and this teaching is at the very heart of the Lord's post resurrection ministry. And this same subject cannot be separated from the same message, directed to the same people, the Jewish people – after the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection the next phase of God's purpose concerning this commission was to begin in Jerusalem with those who would be gathered together to receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them – Which again would pose a question for us – power to do what and why?

h). Let's return for a moment though to look at the different facets of the commission given to the disciples in the 3 synoptic Gospels and Acts as this will help us understand exactly what the disciples had been commissioned to do and help us to see what the Book of Acts is about – Firstly, we will look at Matthew - 19 *"Go [Lit. 'having gone'] therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;*

We begin with a translation issue, where the verb 'go', because of the verb tense it is written in, should be translated 'having gone' and having gone disciples were to be made 'of all nations'; they were to be baptized and taught all the things the Lord had previously taught – things pertaining to the King and His Kingdom – 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'.

i). What we will notice straight away is that there is nothing here in these verses that concerns eternal salvation, but rather it concerns that which the Christ had taught throughout to an eternally saved people – the Kingdom of the heavens – disciples can only be made from those who are eternally saved, and baptism must always follow salvation as we see in the Red Sea crossing following Passover in Exodus. And of course, both the Passover and the Red Sea crossing have to do with rulership in a Theocracy.

j). Now let's add what we saw in Mark - Mr 16:15 *And He said to them, "Go [Lit. 'having gone'] into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

We have the same translation issue to begin with, and so we should understand the beginning of these verses as ‘Having gone into all the world, preach the gospel.....’ And this statement would of necessity cause us to ask, ‘Which gospel?’ – well the answer is in the verses themselves. Those who hear the ‘good news’ which is preached to them are then to be baptized so that they will be saved. And this process is exactly what we saw at the Lord’s first advent – Mt 3:1 ¶ *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'" 4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

This is a process that has nothing to do with eternal salvation otherwise works would enter a realm in which they cannot possibly exist, rather it has to do with deliverance from sin, deliverance from a perverse generation for those who were already eternally saved.

Then we will note that ‘signs’ are present in this setting accompanying the preaching of the gospel, just as we saw at the Lord’s first advent and we know that signs can only be present if both Israel and the Kingdom of the Heavens are in view at the same time.

And so, hopefully the picture starts to become clearer – we have Jews preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, baptizing and making disciples of all nations, making disciples of those who believe the message being preached with signs following.

And this is what we find in Luke with some more detail added - 47 *"and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 "And you are witnesses of these things. 49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."*

The message that the disciples are commissioned to preach must begin in Jerusalem – and if we add the additional detail Luke gives in Acts –

Ac 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

We can see the progression of events as they were supposed to unfold – the disciples would receive power, this being the reason why they were to tarry in Jerusalem, which would empower them to preach the message in Jerusalem, with the message then being taken to ‘all Judea’ and then to ‘Samaria’ and then ‘to the end of the earth’.

k). It is then the message of the King and His Kingdom that is to be preached in Jerusalem with a view to the message of the King and His Kingdom being preached to the end of the earth with disciples being made of all nations with respect to this message.

l). What we are seeing then is the opportunity for Israel to fulfill her national calling as set out in - Isa 43:1 ¶ *But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.....10 "You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me. 11 I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior. 12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And there was no foreign god among you; Therefore you are My witnesses," Says the LORD, "that I am God.*

These verses in Isaiah 43 deal with a restored and delivered Jewish nation who would be God’s witnesses to the end of the earth. Now we know of course that these verses await fulfillment at the end of the Great Tribulation, but they could equally have been applicable to Israel delivered from Egypt or Israel had they been delivered from Gentile world power at the Lord’s first advent or Israel had they been delivered from Gentile world power during the time covered by the Book of Acts – National repentance though is the key – it is the reason for the Kingdom message in the Gospel accounts, ‘Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’.

m). And as the disciples would receive power to preach this message in Jerusalem so national repentance would still be at its heart, because all is contingent upon it.

n). And if the nation would repent in response to the disciples’ preaching then the Christ would return and establish His Kingdom and the

Jewish people would fulfill their calling to be God's witnesses to the end of the earth - Ac 3:19 *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

3). Israel's future repentance and the fulfillment of the nation's calling has been set out in the type of the prophet Jonah - Jon 1:1 ¶ *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

Jonah forms a type, a picture, of the nation of Israel, with the commission to 'go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it'. And Nineveh is used as an all-inclusive way to picture all the Gentile nations of the earth – and we will recall here the disciples' commission to make disciples of all nations.

a). Jonah, as we see, refused to follow the Lord's direction, trying to flee instead from the presence of the Lord – something impossible to do.

b). And Jonah's actions encapsulate Israel's history of disobedience and unfaithfulness, with them 'fleeing' for centuries from the presence of the Lord, trying to hide themselves from His sight.

c). And in doing so they had drawn back from the promises given to Abraham thereby not allowing God's promised blessing to come to the Gentile nations - Ge 22:18 *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

The words spoken here to Abraham could just as easily be spoken to Israel in that future day when this promise will be realized.

d). And we can return to Jonah to see the end of the matter – Jon 2:7 *"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. 8 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." 10 ¶ So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.....3:1 ¶ Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to*

Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

So here is the picture of the nation's repentance in line with 2 Chronicles 7:14, followed by deliverance from the place of death and the fulfillment of the nation's calling.

And the very same picture presented through Jonah can be seen in another type, presenting the matter from a slightly different perspective, through Joseph's brothers after Joseph has made himself known to them –
Ge 45:26a *And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt."*

e). Joseph forms the type of the Christ, *He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs* and the Jewish people were to be witnesses to this taking the message to the Gentile nations of the earth in the antitype of Joseph's brothers – Jesus is alive and is governor over all the earth.

f). But key to this, as we have already seen, is repentance on the part of the Jewish nation and the message of repentance seen throughout the Gospel accounts is inextricably linked to the Kingdom of the Heavens, to replacing Satan and his angels as the rulers over the Gentile nations of the earth from the heavenly realm of the Kingdom.

g). However, we have also seen that the call to repentance and the offered Kingdom had been rejected by the nation of Israel during the 3 ½ years of the Lord's earthly ministry, resulting in the Lord's statement that the Kingdom would be taken from them in - Mt 21:43 *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*

Consequently, an entirely new group would be brought into existence to bear the fruits of the Kingdom of the Heavens in Israel's place.

h). Now, although the Lord's statement has no ambiguity, it does not mean that its content was enacted precisely when it was given. From the benefit of viewing things with all the scriptures at our disposal we can know that what the Lord said did happen, but as events played out on the ground, so to speak, there was still a legitimate opportunity for things to turn out differently.

i). With this in mind let's remember a parable we had looked at some weeks back - Lu 13:6 ¶ He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 "Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 "But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 'And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

The fig tree is a symbolic representation of the nation of Israel, the nation to whom the Lord came seeking fruit in relation to the Kingdom of the Heavens for 3 years and finding none. V6-7 then would bring us to the point in time seen in Matthew Chapter 21 and would encompass the Lord's crucifixion as well.

j). With v8-9 then covering the 3 decades of time seen in the Book of Acts where the Kingdom of the Heavens was being re-offered to the Jewish people by the newly formed nation with a view to Israel repenting and fulfilling their calling as seen in Isaiah and thus fulfilling the commission given in the Gospels and Acts within Christ's Kingdom, bringing to completion the promises given to Abraham and fulfilling the purpose for man's creation.

We will continue with this next time – if the Lord is willing.