

BIBLE STUDY

The Life of Jesus Christ

Nazareth and Galilee

Study Section 6



Jesus Christ: Part 14

Nazareth and Galilee

Having left Jerusalem, following the cleansing of the Temple, and the discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus went with His disciples into Judea. They initially went into the same area where the Baptist and his remaining disciples were baptizing (John 4:22-36). John continues the record from this point, indicating that Jesus and His disciples left Judea to return into Galilee.

It was probably just prior to Jesus' departure, that John the Baptist was thrown into prison (Matt. 4:12). The preaching of Jesus in Judea appeared to be bringing about a speedy reaction from the authorities in Jerusalem. It would appear that they were having Jesus watched. (John 3:25; John 4:1) Conversions and baptisms were increasing beyond even the efforts of the Baptist. John notes, however, that Jesus Himself, baptized no one. (John 4:2) It might be inferred that this was specifically noted by John because this was intentional on the part of Jesus, in order that no one could later take pride in the fact that the Lord had baptized them. Paul, in his preaching, followed this pattern for the same reason. (1 Cor. 1: 11-15)

When word of the Pharisees' interest in His preaching and in His success reached Jesus (John 4:1), it apparently brought work in this area to a halt for the moment. Jesus knew how the wiles of the rulers had been tried out against the Baptist (Matt. 3:7) and would have also heard about the attempt that had been made to unsettle John's disciples (John 3:25). This seems to have been followed by the news that John had been taken prisoner.

During his ministry, John the Baptist had pointed an accusing finger of stern rebuke at the King, who had disowned his wife, the daughter of Aretas, King of Petra, in order to acquire another wife. This new wife was the notorious Herodias, whom Herod stole from his brother Philip. It is probable that, in spite of the directness of John's reproof, Herod would have hesitated to do anything against him, but for encouragement given by the Pharisees, and the poisonous bitterness of Herodias. As it later turned out, she was not even content to have John flung into a prison, but tricked Herod into having the Baptist beheaded. (Matt. 14:6-13) (Josephus, Antiquities, 18.5.2)

(Herod the Tetrarch was Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, and half-brother of Archelaus.)

With the danger of similar actions against Jesus, coming from the Pharisees of Judea, at this early stage in His ministry, Jesus would have been unwilling to put His fledgling disciples under such strain. So being warned about this, it would appear that He sent His Judean disciples back to their homes for the moment. With His handful of Galilean disciples, he left for Galilee. (Matt. 4:12; John 4: 1-3; Luke 4:14; Mark 1:14)

John is the only writer who gives any detail about the journey to Galilee. He states that Jesus, with His disciples, had to pass through Samaria. In so doing they came to Sychar, a city of Samaria, (John 4:4, 5) near the piece of land that Jacob (Israel) gave to His son Joseph. (Gen. 33:18-20) The city of Sychar is mentioned only in this Gospel record in John. This could have been a Jewish name for the city of Shechem, or a smaller town nearby. The majority of modern day scholars identify this reference as Askar, a town near the location of Jacob's well.

A great deal of hostility existed between the Samaritans and the Jews. In travelling from Judea to Galilee, most Jews, including the Pharisees, took a route through Perea, to avoid contact with the Samaritans. According to Josephus, however, Galileans normally took the shorter route through Samaria when going to and from Jerusalem. (Compare Luke 9:51-52) On the surface, it would appear that Jesus possibly took this route in order to avoid encountering either the Pharisees or Herod's men.

Many of the events unique to John's Gospel are included because of spiritual significance. We might thus consider seeking a deeper meaning behind Jesus' choice of routes. Considering the hostile Jewish attitude in Jerusalem, and His rejection by them because of His appearance in the Temple, His departure through a Gentile area could convey a symbolic foreshadowing. A parallel can be seen between this and Jesus' final rejection and crucifixion in Jerusalem. The Good News of God's Word, and the opportunity for salvation through His Son, was as a result opened up to the Gentile world.

The Samaritans

The origin of the people living in this area at the time of Jesus is provided in 2nd kings chapter 17, verses 24-41. They were a mixed people from Babylon, Aba, Cuthah, Hamath and Sephareaim, brought into the territory of the Northern Kingdom of Israel following the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes (Ezra 4:2, 10). They sought to

embrace the religion of the land, but continued to worship idols. When Judah returned from a subsequent captivity in Babylon, these Samaritans endeavoured to identify with them. During the 70 years in that captivity, the Samaritans had inter-married with some of the poor remnant of Judah left behind by Nebuchadnezzar. They wanted to share in the work of rebuilding the Temple and the benefit of its religious privileges. However, this was refused.

About B.C. 409, Manasseh, the Priest, who had been expelled by Nehemiah because of his marriage to the daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite (Neh. 13:28), obtained permission from the King of Persia to erect a Temple on Mt. Gerizim. This represented the establishment of a rival religion, and great antagonism resulted. They perpetuated various outrages against the Jews. On one occasion they managed to enter into the Temple, profaning it by scattering dead men's bones on the sacred pavement.

(Josephus) Outrageous acts like this, remained as bitter memories in Jewish history, and thus the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. (John 4: 9)

The Samaritans claimed observance of the law, and boasted that they possessed the authentic copy of it. Among other things, they substituted Gerizim for Ebal in Deut. 27:4, to support Gerizim's claim to sanctity. They claimed that it, not Jerusalem, was God's chosen sanctuary. The Gerizim Temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, about 129 B. C., (Josephus), but it remained a Holy place of the Samaritans. Its ruins were still visible in Christ's time.

The Samaritans, too, were looking for Messiah, who would come as a Prophet and tell them all things (John 4:25). Although they had perverted the Jewish religion, it was part of their religious system that they were descended from Joseph, the son of Jacob, through Ephraim and Manasseh.

Bible Accuracy

A present day contribution by Samaria comes to Bible students in that records regarding this area provide another verification of faith in God's Word. History confirms that Shalmaneser V, King of Assyria, assaulted Samaria around 727 B.C. The city held out for 3 years, during which time the Assyrian King died. One of his generals took over the throne and took on the name of Sargon 2. This name was unknown except in Bible text (Isaiah 20:1), and so his existence was looked upon as a Bible myth. In 1843 a French scholar, Paul Botta, discovered his palace at Khorsabad. Highlights of his reign are inscribed on the palace walls. One of these inscriptions provides us with a wonderful proof of Bible authenticity:

“At the beginning of my rule, ...I set siege to and conquered Samaria... I carried away into captivity 27,290 persons...”

Other records found there, state that deported people from other lands were then brought in and settled in Samaria, so that the population might be strongly mixed. These and other facts found in his palace, closely parallel the Bible record of 2 Kings Chapter 17, verses 3-6. It was at that time that God’s Word declares:

“...The Lord removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants, the Prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria, until this day.” 2 Kings 17:23

The land was then re-settled with Gentiles as described in verses 24-41. So modern day historical discoveries confirm, with amazing detail, the manner in which the 10 Tribes of Israel became, indeed, “the lost Tribes”, for they have never again emerged in world history as a definitely identified group.

The mixture of people in and about Samaria came to be known as the Samaritans. The heart of a faithful Bible student must be filled with thanksgiving to God for the truth and reliability of His Word. We are reminded of all this when reading of Jesus’ encounter with one of the descendants of these people, the Samaritan woman at the well.

Jacob’s Well

It is important to remember that Jesus’ departure from Judea was caused by animosity from the Jews. Now He was moving into the area of Gentile hatred. Jesus, footsore and weary, arrived at Jacob’s well which is located between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, the mounts of cursing and blessing (Deut. 27:12, 13). Jesus tired and weary as He was rested there. It was a highly significant spot where He had chosen to sit whilst awaiting the return of His disciples, who had gone into the village to obtain provisions.

It was near the spot that Abraham built an altar to God and received the promise, “unto thy seed will I give this land”. (Gen. 12: 6, 7) Here, also, Jacob built his altar, not far from the well he dug (Gen. 33:18-20), later bequeathing the area to Joseph (Gen. 48:22) who was later buried there (Joshua 24:32). Jacob met Rachel at a well. (Gen. 29:10,11) and it was Rachel who was the mother of Joseph, the patriarch whom the Samaritans claimed as their own. At this point Jesus was to be the source of transformation for a woman who looked for authority to Joseph. (A type of Christ)

Jesus at this point in the record, also provided a lesson for not only His disciples when they returned, but for all of us who today desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Although Jesus was tired, sharing the frailty of other men, uppermost in His mind was His Father's purpose with Him.

The Meeting at the Well - (John 4:7-26)

It was natural for a weary and thirsty traveller, who had "nothing to draw with", to say "give Me a drink" to this Samaritan woman who came to the well as Jesus sat alone. But we must remember the history that would have been in this woman's mind as she faced a Jew. The bad blood between the two communities had existed unabated since the time of return from the captivity in Babylon. The semi-Gentile origins of the Samaritans were despised. The rejection of the Psalms and Prophets from the Scriptures was resented. The choice of Mount Gerizim as a Holy site in place of Mount Zion was condemned. Their easy-going standards of religion were scorned. In the woman's mind, all of this attitude of animosity from the Jews would be represented in the man before her.

It is not surprising that the woman would respond by asking why a Jew would request a drink of water from her. (verse 9) Jesus' response to her is typical of the way, in which, throughout His preaching, He responded to people's questions in a manner that would illustrate that He knew what was in their heart, and which would demonstrate His dedication to pursuing His Father's purposes. It was His custom to break through traditions, which were merely stupid and meaningless, especially when they had their source in passion and hatred.

In approaching this woman, Jesus was really more interested in giving than in receiving, just as when God asks something of us it is because He wants to give of Himself to us. We find an echo of this conversation between Jesus and this woman in the Book of Proverbs, which is particularly relevant to what we come to further learn about the woman. The quotation is further echoed in the setting of this conversation:

"Give Me your heart, My son, and let your eyes delight in My ways. For a harlot is a deep pit, and an adulteress woman is a narrow well."
Proverbs 23:26, 27

If she knew the "gift of God", and who it was who asked her for a drink, she would ask of Him, and would receive "living water". (John 4:10) As Jesus had explained to Nicodemus, He was, Himself, the "Gift of God" (John 3:16).

Anyone coming to the well would be able to draw water, but Jesus was offering water which would come forth from a spring or a fountain - living water, that suggested the same inexhaustible supply as Jesus' teaching, which would lead a person to eternal life. He was making her aware that even as she stood at the natural well, she was standing face to face with a richer, more enlivening well, - a well of truth which only He could dispense to her. The water she could drink from this spiritual well would be in her as a fountain of living and life-giving water. Later on, at the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, Jesus would echo these same words when speaking to the Jews:

“...If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water”. John 7:37, 38

The woman was unable to grasp the spiritual meaning of Jesus' words, but her tone became more respectful, calling Him “Sir”. (verse 11) As she continued the discussion with Him she was obviously recalling the heritage that the Samaritans' felt that they had in Jacob. She saw the well by which they were standing, bequeathed to all later generations by Jacob, as a symbol of the divine promise inherited from Him by His descendants. It was a promise of a centre of worship, with an altar, and a place of ready access to God, a promise of a multitudinous seed, and of an anointed Messiah, fallen and raised up again. (Genesis 28:12-19)

Was Jesus actually offering something better than that? Jacob's well had not only refreshed him and his sons, but had also saved the lives of his flocks and herds. Possibly remembering that when Jacob came to Shechem where he dug the well, he was blessed with numerous cattle (Gen. 33:17) she considered if this man before her was greater than Jacob? (verse 12)

Jesus now explained that it was water of a different sort He had in mind. Ordinary water could only allay thirst temporarily. The water He meant would give permanent relief, and eternal life. (verses 12, 13) Now she was really interested. Coming to the well regularly was a burden, as also was the thirst which made the drawing of the water necessary. So she asks: “Sir, give me this water...” (verse 15) She acknowledged a need, and asked for help, just as we acknowledge a need and look for salvation in Jesus.

Jesus' response, “Go call your husband, and come here”, appears irrelevant, until we realize that it represents two aspects of a true response to Jesus' call. First, there has to be a realization of our sinfulness, and acknowledgment of it, coupled with a desire to repent, or change, from the way of sinfulness. Second, there should be an inherent

desire to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. The woman responded that she had no husband. This total stranger then astounded her by revealing that He knew that not only was this true, but that she had 5 previous husbands and the man with whom she was now living was not her husband.

The woman then acknowledged Jesus as a Prophet, something remarkable for a Samaritan. They accepted only the authority of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. On the basis of Deut. 18:18, 19, they looked for a Prophet to come. In the meantime, however, they rejected the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament. While recognizing Jesus as a Prophet, the woman shrank from accepting Him as “the greater than Moses” of Deut. 18. She put to Him the age long conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans, as to whether Jerusalem or Gerizim was to be the correct place of worship. The Lord’s answer was clear. Both Jerusalem and Gerizim were destined to fall. The Romans fulfilled Jesus’ words in A. D. 70.

Salvation was to come through the Jews, (John 4:22), not the Samaritans, but God did not exclude any. He wanted worshippers, both Jews and Samaritans, who would earnestly seek to identify themselves with Him in Spirit and in Truth. (verse 24,) that is in mind and in deeds. (compare Acts 15:14; Ephesians 2:11-14) The woman, having been brought this far, was now consciously groping for the truth:

“...I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us”. John 4:25

Jesus’ simple response is one that we should all remember when thinking of Him and studying His life in the Gospel:

“...I...am He”. John 4:26

Step by step, Jesus had taken her to the point where she had been brought face to face with the One without whom salvation is impossible. This is the lesson that we each must take from this simple meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well:

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”.
Acts 4:12

The Gospel in Samaria - (John 4:27-42)

The woman was still there when the disciples returned from their search for provisions. They were obviously eager to satisfy their curiosity regarding why Jesus was talking with her, or what she wanted, but not one of them commented. (verse 27) Then the woman left, leaving her water pot behind. She went to the city and told the men the Messiah had come, so that they came unto Him.

In the meantime, the disciples desired Jesus to take some food, but He showed little interest in it. They were confused by His response that He had meat to eat that they knew nothing of. To Him, it was food, indeed, to dispense the true knowledge of God's Word, and He invited them to behold the approaching Samaritans as fields ready and "white for harvest". He instructed them of the need to keep in mind their own part in the harvest process.

In what followed, many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony. Contrasting the action of the Jews, whose rejection of Jesus had led to His departure from Judea, they asked Jesus to remain. He stayed there two more days. Many others believed because of their direct contact with Jesus, whom they recognized as the Messiah, "the Saviour of the world". Thus it was in this way that the first Gentile converts came to the Gospel. The way was made clear for a much fuller and wider harvest of true and honest men and women. (Compare Acts 1:8; 8:5; 10:28)

Galilee

Having come to Galilee, after spending the two days in Samaria, Jesus was received enthusiastically. Many of the Galileans had been in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and had witnessed the signs that He had performed following the cleansing of the Temple. (John 4:45) Up until now, Jesus had made no demands on the Galilean disciples that were travelling with Him. He had been quietly preparing them, and now the last stage of that preparation was at hand. For the moment, however, it would appear that He departed from them, for as much as several months, leaving them alone with their families, their nets and their thoughts. In the meantime, He continued travelling through the Galilean area.

So He once again went to Cana, where John recorded that He had performed His first miracle. It is here, once again, that He performed another miracle. John notes that this is the second sign that Jesus performed in Galilee. Miracles performed between

these two visits to Cana were done so following His cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem.

(John 4:54) While in Cana, Jesus received a visit from a high official of Capernaum, who was in great personal distress. His son lay at the point of death. Hearing that Jesus had returned from Judea, he travelled the 25 miles that separated Capernaum from Cana, and finding Jesus, pleaded with Him to return with Him to heal his son. (John 4:46, 47) In view of the man's obvious faith shown in making this journey, the reply of Jesus must have sounded strange:

“...Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe”. John 4:48

This is the only time in the Gospels that the word “wonders” is used with reference to the miracles of Jesus. It serves to emphasize the contrast that Jesus had very recently experienced between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews demanded miraculous marvels. The Samaritans responded with a spontaneous belief as soon as they were told about Jesus by one of their least reputable citizens. (John 4:39) But Jesus' words did not imply that He was going to disappoint this desperate man. He was going to use the occasion to bring greater blessings than even the restoration of a dying boy. He was about to show the Nobleman that the power of God vested in Him did not need His actual presence at the scene of its ministry. There was no necessity to see the signs and wonders.

This man, along with the countless number who have followed Christ, had to understand that the power of Christ does not depend upon His physical presence. This Royal Official had shown a strong but imperfect faith in coming to Cana. Jesus sought to perfect it. In desperation, he swept aside the Lord's seeming reluctance, pressing his request in a cry of anxiety and misery: “Sir, come down before my child dies”. (4:49) Then Jesus made His meaning clear by relating it to the man's personal trouble, “go your way; your son lives”. There could be no doubt in Jesus' meaning now, and the man believed His word. His faith was to be tried yet further for he would not arrive back home until the next day.

He was met on the road by joyous members of his household staff, who announced that his son lived. Not only that, his recovery had occurred at the exact hour that Jesus told him that his son lives. (4:51-53) The Divine purpose was accomplished. The man believed, along with his whole house. With a word, Jesus had saved more than the single life that was ebbing away in the quiet house in Capernaum, and Jesus' fame went further abroad in Galilee.

It is at this point that John ends his Gospel record regarding Jesus until He returns to Jerusalem for the second Passover. The other three Gospel writers fill in the detail during this period.

We turn first to Luke, chapter 4. His record has been silent on everything that transpired from the time of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, until this point of Jesus' return to Galilee. He describes the general conditions prevailing during and following Jesus' second sign in Cana:

“And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all”. Luke 4:14, 15

He then provides an echo attesting to the truth of Jesus' words which were recorded by John following the departure from Samaria:

“For Jesus Himself testified that a Prophet has no honour in His own country”. John 4: 44

Jesus wanted to return to Nazareth, His hometown, and preach the Gospel there. It was, on His part, an act of grace to a place filled with many childhood memories. But to the people of His hometown, He was just a carpenter's son.

Nazareth - Luke 4: 16-30

To quote one writer, Nazareth was an unusual centre. It lies on the most southern of the ranges of lower Galilee, just above the Plain of Esdraelon. You cannot see the surrounding country, because Nazareth rests in a basin. But the moment you climb to the edge of this basin, you see 30 miles in three directions. It is a map of Old Testament history. Esdraelon lies before you, with its 20 battlefields - - - the scenes of Barak's and of Gideon's victories, of Saul's and Josiah's defeats, of the struggles for freedom in the days of the Maccabees. There is Naboth's vineyard and the place of Jehu's revenge upon Jezebel. There is Shunem and the house of Elijah, and Carmel, the place of Elijah's sacrifice. To the east is the valley of Jordan with the range of Gilead. To the west is the Great Sea. The mountains of Tabor, Carmel, and Hermon can be seen rising in the distance. But all these historic places filled with memories of a triumphant faith were not enough to stir the spiritually dead inhabitants of Nazareth.

Luke states that Jesus came to His hometown, and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue service usually consisted of two opening benedictions, a reading from the law, a prayer, a reading from the Prophets, an address based on the reading and then the final benediction, as recorded in Numbers 6:24-26.

The words of this benediction are echoed in hymns utilized in Christian Churches today, and are particularly suitable as requests for a blessing upon one who is newly baptized:

**“The Lord bless you, and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”.**

Scrolls of the Scriptures were kept near the speaker’s rostrum, and not far from the “chief seats” which the Scribes and Pharisees loved to occupy. (Matthew 23:6) The man referred to in Luke 4:20, as “the attendant”, was called in Hebrew “Chazzan”. He had several duties. One was to take out and put back the sacred rolls of Scripture. He had to keep the synagogue clean. He announced the coming of the Sabbath from the roof of the synagogue with three blasts from a silver trumpet, and he was the teacher in the village school. Another thing to note in the same verse is that, when a Jewish Rabbi spoke, he “sat down”. (Compare Matt. 5:1; Matt. 23:2; Acts 13:14, 15)

Having read from the scroll, Jesus was announcing that He had something to say about it when He sat down. In these circumstances, it was usual to be asked to speak. And so we see in verse 20, “...the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him”. (Luke 4:20) He probably spoke many words to them, but the focus of His discourse was that **He was the fulfilment of the passage in Isaiah from which He had read and that He was the promised Messiah.**

They quickly grasped the meaning of His words, and while they marvelled at the eloquence of His speech, they could not see Him as anything but Joseph’s son. Jesus knew that, lacking faith, they wanted more from Him than He was prepared to give at that moment. They would want signs and wonders, as He had performed in Capernaum, causing Him to reaffirm the thought that He had expressed as He left Samaria regarding acceptance and honour. (Luke 4:22-24) Because He wanted to impress upon them the seriousness of their position, He then drew to their attention the examples of Elijah and Elisha, two of Israel’s greatest prophets. (Luke 4:25-27)

Although there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's day, he was sent to a Gentile during the 3 ½ year drought, and God blessed her house. Although there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time, the Gentile, Naaman, was the one who was cleansed in the Jordan waters.

The lesson provided by Jesus in the synagogue, taken from these two echoes out of Israel's past, instantly enraged these men of Nazareth. The fact that each of the individuals saved in Jesus' examples was a Gentile would annoy these men. But the real anger would come with the realization that Jesus was suggesting that they, themselves, were no more faithful than their ancestors were when Elijah and Elisha ministered to them.

This rage turned to blind unreasoning fury. They took hold of Jesus and dragged Him from the synagogue to the brow of the hill above the city, intending to cast Him down headlong. Once again Jesus would have been confronted with one of the temptations in the wilderness. He could have let them throw Him off the hill, and He would have landed safely, for His hour was not yet come. Their rage would have turned to wonder and acceptance for the wrong reasons. Instead, in the noisy confusion, Jesus simply passed through their midst, and quietly went on His way. (Luke 4:28-30)

The Teaching from Isaiah

Luke quotes the words that Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah when He stood up to read in the synagogue:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are down-trodden, To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord”. Luke 4:18, 19

He then proclaimed that this wonderful prophecy was being fulfilled in and through Him at that very time. And, indeed, this is what Jesus was doing and continued to do up until the time of His crucifixion. A Bible reference takes us back to Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 and 2, which were the source of Jesus' words. However, an examination of that reference shows that Jesus did not complete the second verse in this prophecy:

“To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn”, Isaiah 61:2

If He had said this, He could not then have added that the Scripture was being fulfilled that day in His listeners' ears. The completion of this prophecy did not happen during Jesus' lifetime, nor has it happened yet. This "day of vengeance" belongs to the second advent of Christ, not the first. The prophecy therefore speaks of the two advents of Christ. His first was intended to preach the acceptable year of God and to call upon men everywhere to repent and seek salvation through Him. His second advent will be as a judge to manifest God's vengeance upon a lawless and sinful world, which has rejected Him, just as they did in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the days of Noah.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, speaks of the time yet to come when the words that Jesus did not speak in the synagogue that day will be fulfilled:

"...To give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty Angels in flaming fire, Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." 2 Thess. 1:7-9

Christ's Warning

Apart from indicating that their rejection of Him would cause Him to turn to the Gentiles, Jesus provided a stern warning in the lessons He selected from the history of the Jews. When Elijah proclaimed drought on the land, (1 Kings 17), it lasted for 3 ½ years. (Bible echo - the period of Christ's ministry) Throughout this period of their thirst, a Gentile woman was sustained because she had faith in God's Word. Faithless Israel represented the real widows, suffering the absence of God to sustain them.

Similarly, when Naaman was cured, (2 Kings 5), he alone was cured, although there were many lepers in Israel. Remembering that, in the Bible, leprosy is representative of a sinful condition, the lesson was clear. Uncleansed by God's healing word, the faithless, sinful, children of Israel were the real lepers, and they would continue in their condition unless faith brought them to Christ.

Each one of us should consider personally the lesson that Jesus delivered in Nazareth that day. The widow was saved because she believed and obeyed God's Word, and was sustained through the life-giving food of the Word which Jesus provided in endless quantity. Naaman, the Syrian, was cleansed from leprosy (typical of sin)

because he believed and obeyed God's Word and washed in the water, as he was commanded. (A symbol of baptism).

Through the Jews' rejection of their Messiah, salvation came to those who are Gentiles by natural birth. His lesson that day teaches us that if we seek salvation we must listen to His Word, and show our desire to please God through repentance, baptism, and leading a life acceptable to God.

Capernaum

Jesus walked through the midst of the enraged townspeople in Nazareth and made His lonely way over the mountains towards Capernaum. Nazareth, like Jerusalem, had not known the day of her visitation, and she was to suffer the condemnation of Christ's neglect. He had come to His own, and His own had not received Him. (Bible echo) No longer was Nazareth to be called His city. This honour would be reserved for the hometown of His disciples, James and John, Peter and Andrew. It is true that Capernaum was not worthy of Him, and would yet be the subject of His condemnation. But no city or place will be worthy of the coming of the Son of Man until the day when He comes to fill the earth with God's glory and bring in everlasting righteousness and peace. Capernaum was about 20 miles away from Nazareth, to the north east, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Here He immediately found shelter and an enthusiastic response to His message - - - so much so, that the city has been called "His own city" (Matt. 9:1; Mark 2:1)

Matthew's Gospel, which has been silent on detail regarding Jesus' life since the temptation in the wilderness, now picks up the record. He begins by referring to the fact that Jesus came into Galilee following the imprisonment of the Baptist. (4:12) He then states that Jesus left Nazareth, and came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew then shows us that this was no random move on Jesus' part, by providing a Bible echo verifying that this was a fulfilment of a prophecy from Isaiah:

"This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the Prophet saying, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and the shadow of death, upon them a light dawned". Matthew 4:14-16; (Compare Isaiah 9:1, 2)

He then goes on to say that from that time Jesus began to preach and say, "repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". (Matt. 4:17)

It was at this point, that Jesus reunited with Andrew, James, John and Peter, who lived at Bethsaida, the fishing quarter of Capernaum. They rededicated themselves to following Him from that point forward, after the demonstration of His power in the miraculous catch of fish. (The details of this event are recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and were covered in the section of these studies under the heading “The Final Selection of the Twelve”) These four disciples then remained with Jesus as He spent some time in Capernaum preaching and performing mighty works among the people.

The Sabbath which followed the calling of the four disciples from their lake-side tasks was a memorable one. Both Mark (1:21-28), and Luke (4:31-37), record the events of that day, but it is Mark who establishes the chronological order, saying that they went into the Synagogue to preach on the Sabbath immediately following the miraculous catch of fish. This appears to have been the only synagogue in Capernaum. His open-air teaching and His miracles in recent days had obviously made the people eager to hear more. Synagogue preaching throughout Galilee then became the Lord’s policy for a while to come. (Luke 4:44) As these eager Galileans listened to Jesus in the more formal style of the Synagogue, it was forced upon their minds how drastically different was His manner of teaching from that of the Scribes. Rather than quote the opinions and pronouncements of celebrated teachers of former days, He spoke with authority and delivered His own message. (Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32)

There was in the assembly, gathered before Him, a man who had been afflicted with a recurring mental illness, possibly schizophrenia as we would diagnose it in our day. He must have been in a normal frame of mind as Jesus began to speak; otherwise, of course, care would have been taken to exclude him from the Synagogue. Even as the people were marvelling at what they heard from Jesus and how it was said, the man’s mental illness suddenly asserted itself once again. The words of grace had been too much for his distressed spirit. His voice rang through the building:

“What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - - - the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:24

Many of the Old Testament prophecies spoke of the coming of the Messiah from God. In addition to the blessings of the Messiah, these prophecies spoke of judgement. Malachi refers to the “great and terrible day of the Lord”. This man referred to Nazareth. It was in Nazareth that Jesus enraged the men of the Synagogue when He spoke to them of their faithlessness. The fame of Jesus had spread throughout the

whole area. Knowledge of that confrontation would no doubt have reached Capernaum. The Scripture from Isaiah that Jesus had chosen to read in Nazareth was the one that referred to “the day of vengeance of our God”. (Isaiah 61:2) Realizing that Jesus was, indeed, the promised One, because of his mental illness the man could not contain the confused jumble of fact and rumour. To him, this Holy One of God was there to devastate Galilee. Then as everyone watched, no doubt in anxious embarrassment, Jesus silenced the shouts with a word: “...**Be quiet, and come out of him!**” Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35

The command initially produced a convulsion in the man as healing took place, then he lay still, his mental illness healed and his sanity restored. The power of Christ had once more prevailed.

If the teaching of Jesus had amazed the people, this supreme mastery over what they saw as evil spirits awoke in them something that was entirely new. Influenced by the mythology of Greek Culture, which in some cases bore a close relationship to Roman pagan beliefs, the Jews had long been exposed to the concept of malignant spirits. Out of this came a common belief that disease was the result of indwelling demons, and in the case of mental disorders, epileptic fits, and other similar mental illnesses, one can sympathize with the bewilderment and lack of understanding which led to such a belief. A person afflicted with mental illness was accepted philosophically, but few entertained a hope of cure, in spite of the spectacular efforts of people at that time.

Jesus had just stirred the people to their depths with words which both amazed and charmed them. That He should follow this by bringing sanity and peace to this poor man suffering from such a devastating mental illness brought forth indescribable emotions. Mark records, “and immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee”. (Mark 1:28)

Demons

There is no reference to supernatural, malignant spirits or powers taking over peoples’ minds or bodies throughout God’s Word in the Old Testament. In the King James’ version of the New Testament, a Greek word, “daimonion”, has been incorrectly translated as devils and this has been corrected in the majority of later versions to read “demons”.

But what are we to understand the reference to “demons” as used in the New Testament to mean? We find from history and Greek mythology, that the pagan

beliefs considered them to be human departed spirits raised to the rank of gods, and allegedly entering living people causing certain disorders of the mind, such as schizophrenia or psychosis, epilepsy, hearing and speech impairment, etc. Medical knowledge was not as extensive as it has today and able to explain many of the reasons for these illnesses. We have an illustration of this in the English word “lunatic” which originated from the idea that ‘madness’ was the result of the moon’s influence, but which is because of modern knowledge is longer used to express that idea.

We must note that the descriptions given of the healings performed in the New Testament show that such healings were complete and final. For examples we read:

Matthew 17: 15-18

“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. - - - and Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and *the boy was cured at once*”.

Matthew 12:22

“Then there was brought to Him a demon possessed man, who was blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that *the dumb man spoke and saw*”.

Regardless of the form in which these illnesses are expressed, which was in keeping with the medical understanding of the people of the day, the supremacy of Christ over all kinds of afflictions and infirmities is the message that is being taught. It was the message being provided to those who witnessed these miracles, in order to authenticate Jesus’ position as the Son of God, and that He was vested with His Father’s power.

Christ does not say anything after the healing to warn people how to avoid being “possessed” again. He was simply showing that God was far more powerful than anything that man can imagine. It is interesting to note that the Church of England in 1996 issued an official statement stating that hell is not a flaming pit populated by demons and devils and that “traditional images of hell as an eternal torment are wrong”. They further went on to say that “the horrible demons are the imaginations of inventors and medievalists”.

The concept of ‘evil demons’ was developed among some early Church philosophical intellectuals in the second, third and fourth centuries, building upon references to the word “demons” in the New Testament. It was their intention to terrify people into becoming believers. In so doing, the simple message of Christ, and the healing of men’s and women’s spirits in Him, was mutated into a fear of evil, supernatural powers.

Peter’s Mother-In-Law

The sensational story of what had happened in the Synagogue erupted through the town and into all the surrounding countryside. Everybody was talking about Jesus of Nazareth. The “year of popularity” had begun.

Jesus left the Synagogue with His four disciples and went to Peter’s house. This is recorded in all of the Gospels but John. (Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38, 39) Now Peter was a married man, and lived in a house with his wife and mother-in-law, and shared his home with his brother Andrew. However, Jesus could not be welcomed by the usual hospitality on that particular Sabbath because Peter’s mother-in-law was seriously ill with “a great fever”, so they requested help from Jesus on her behalf. According to one historical authority, this expression ‘a great fever’ was used by contemporaries to describe what was, judging from the symptoms, typhoid fever. The fever was most acute, and (Luke’s Greek seemed to imply), was continuing, without showing any sign of abating.

In a moment, the whole scene was transformed. Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand and the fever left her. Within minutes, the bed lay empty, and the stricken woman was busily preparing a meal for them. It is interesting to note that Matthew and Mark simply say that the fever left her - she was cured. Luke, who was a physician, in describing this cure, says that Jesus “rebuked the fever”. This is the same word that Mark used to describe Jesus’ cure of the deaf and dumb man, in front of a crowd:

“...He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, you deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him...” Mark 9:25

Further Miracles

The Lord’s reputation as a worker of miracles and a healer spread rapidly throughout Galilee. Crowds flocked to Capernaum and came to the door of Peter’s house with

their sick relatives and friends. Just try to picture the scene as they all converged upon the fisherman's house, the cries of those sick, those in pain and those crippled. mingling with the shouts of the mentally ill and the appeals of their guardians. Mark described the scene such that it appeared as if "the whole city had gathered at the door". (Mark 1:33) We are told that Jesus merely laid His hands on each of them and they were healed. (Luke 4:40) Matthew's description of that day provides us with a prophetic echo and a symbolic foreshadowing:

"And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the Prophet might be fulfilled saying, He Himself took away our infirmities, and carried away our diseases". Matthew 8:16-17

In this brief description we are provided with a foreshadowing of Jesus' final work in healing our spirits of the evil that is in them and the curing of our sinful human nature, as represented in the sickness and infirmities of those who came to Him. A moving Old Testament reference takes us to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 53, which speaks of Jesus' crucifixion resulting in the ultimate curing of our sinful natures:

"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted". Isaiah 53:4

Refreshment in His Father

All this placed tremendous strain upon the Lord, and it was late when He eventually sank into an exhausted sleep. But very early next morning, long before daylight, He went out to seek the solitude so vital for His daily meditation and communion with His Father in prayer. (Mark 1:35) Christ's habit of frequently seeking quiet communion with God is a habit we also must cultivate. If He found it so necessary, how much more necessary it is for those who desire to follow Him. He knew that strength gained from prayer to the Father, long before the day commenced, was a continuing strength throughout that whole day.

When they awoke, and found Jesus missing, Simon and his companions hunted for Him. When they found Him, they told Him that everyone was still looking for Him. But the time had come in the Master's plans to move on:

“...Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for”. Mark 1:38

Refreshed in spirit, and assured of God’s continued blessing, He preached in all the Synagogues in Galilee, using these official places of worship to reach the people. He taught and healed all who came to Him, even the leper, who, at the Lord’s touch, was cleansed. (Mark 1:40-45; compare Lev. 14)

Enthusiastic Reception in Galilee

While it is recorded that the crowds flocked in excitement to hear Jesus and to witness the miracles performed, it is doubtful if many of them heeded His message. They sought Him eagerly for the eloquence of His words, and the power of His touch, but as to the effect of His message upon them personally, He later said: “...if the mighty works which had been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day”. **Jesus was not deluded by the enthusiasm of the crowds, for He knew what was in the hearts of men.**

LESSON FOR US

It is easy to be excited by the Word of God. Many things in it, when presented eloquently with authority, are able to stir us up to a real enthusiasm, and we will want to eagerly return to hear more.

But it is essential that we take the word personally into our daily lives, and allow it to motivate us and govern our every action. Otherwise:

it may be “more tolerable”, in the day of judgement, for Sodom than for us! Matthew 11:24

Test Yourself

1. Why was John the Baptist killed?
2. What happened in Nazareth and why do you think the Jews rejected the teaching of Jesus?
3. Describe the miracle of healing that Jesus did in the Synagogue at Capernaum and the lessons the miracles of healing can teach us?