



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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Our Lord's Earthly Ministry

by — William Tucker Broad (1860-1923)

I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

Jesus Christ was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, and that the gentiles might glorify God for His mercy (Romans 15:8).

What was the object of our Lord's earthly ministry? The answer to this question is fundamental, for on it depends our right understanding of the New Testament Scriptures.

We are told to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (II Timothy 2:15), to notice carefully the divisions marked out in "*the oracles of God*," and to distinguish things that differ ("*approve things that are excellent*," Philippians 1:10).

Did our Lord come at His first advent for the sake of the Jew, or did He come to start His work among all the peoples of the earth? Was His preaching meant primarily for the Jew, or for all nations? Are we to go to the gospels for our marching orders today?

Most believers would answer off-hand, without stopping to consider, that our Lord's earthly ministry was for all, indiscriminately. If so, the teaching in the gospels will fit us in our modern life of today.

However, when we try to obey the specific commands of our Lord, we find that they do not suit modern conditions. The directions in the gospels are wholly suitable to a Jewish community, but not to a gentile use. They imply a nation under the law of Moses, circumcised and obedient to all of the Mosaic legisla-



tion, and, as such entirely foreign to all today. There is certainly a tremendous amount of uncertainty, and error too, in regard to our Lord's earthly mission.

All Scripture is "*for our learning*" (Romans 15:4). We cannot be too clear on this point; but equally clear must we be that all Scripture is not *about* us. Most of Scripture is *about* the Jew; some small amount is *about* the Gentiles, and some again *about* the present grace.

The student needs to read and study all Scripture, and there is much for him to learn of God, and His ways and dealings with these classes; but the believer should especially know and master the Scriptures about the Body of Christ, and there find specific directions for his own guidance.

The sooner the Bible student realizes that all Scripture is not *about* one general class only, the clearer will be his grasp of what God's Word means. We want to pay more particular attention to what Scripture says on this subject, and it says a great deal.

When we come in our reading across a passage like that spoken by our Lord in Matthew 15:24, "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*," we are apt to be startled by the newness of the idea. ►

It is surely striking. Is it really true that our Lord's earthly ministry was *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Is it true that His preaching, while here on Earth, was for the Jews *only*? For, if so, we must alter many of our modern ideas and practices.

Our whole grasp and mastery of the New Testament depends on this knowledge of our Lord's earthly mission. To be sure of all of the facts, we need to read carefully all of the so-called "New Testament." Such a study clearly reveals *two important truths*.

First of all, our Lord had an earthly ministry conducted by Himself and His apostles, the record of which is contained in the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

Secondly, our Lord had quite as clearly a heavenly ministry addressed to the Body of Christ, composed chiefly of Gentiles, and this is recorded in the Pauline epistles.

These two ministries of our Lord, the earthly and the heavenly, make up the whole teaching and substance of the "New Testament" Scriptures. The "New Testament" is a record of these two and of nothing else.

In the "Old Testament" we read in promise and prophecy of God's Kingdom to the nation of Israel under Messiah. When that time of blessing came the Gentiles would be blessed through the Jew.

At Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with the Jew about this mission. In Exodus 19:1-6, we read about this covenant proposed by God.

In the third month when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai ... And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel. 'Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a

kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."

This covenant was that the Jews should be a nation of priests to mediate between God and the nations. Their duty as such would be to teach the nations God's laws, and to offer up the sacrifices of the Gentiles in worship to God. To this proposed covenant the people gave a speedy answer.

And Moses came, and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

The Lord then said that He would come down to Moses in a thick cloud and speak with him. Meanwhile the people were to sanctify themselves. Three days later, God descended upon Mount Sinai in might and majesty, with smoke, fire, thunders and lightnings, and an earthquake and the voice of the trumpet. Then God gave to the people, through Moses, the Ten Commandments, and His laws as contained in Exodus 20-23. In chapter 24, we read that,

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do."

Moses then wrote out all of the words of the covenant as given in these four chapters, offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord, then read from the book of the covenant in the audience of the people, and again the third time, they promised to obey it.

In this solemn way, God gave to Israel their mission as a nation. They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the earth. They were to minister for God to the nations of the earth as a nation of missionaries proclaiming God's truth. They were to teach the Gentiles, and in due time, Messiah would come to establish His Kingdom over the whole earth.

The Hebrew prophets are full of promises about this

Kingdom, and of statements that Messiah would come to the Jews, and, through them, bless the Gentiles. They are clear about Christ's earthly mission thus promised.

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we have the story of this earthly ministry. In due time, Messiah came exactly as promised. He was promised to the Jew, and He came to the Jew.

Was Christ's ministry to the Jew as the prophets had indicated? It will be worthwhile to examine the evidence in the first gospel, and perhaps elsewhere, so as to get an indication of the true answer.

It is of the utmost importance to be clear on this. So we will examine eight statements in Matthew's gospel and elsewhere in the "New Testament," to see what Scripture teaches on this point.

One

Matthew's gospel starts off with a table of our Lord's descent from Abraham and David. The object is to prove that our Lord was a true Jew, and descended in the royal line through David from Abraham. Hence He is proved to be a Jew, a royal descendant of King David, and in fact the only person alive who had a right to be king of the Jews.

As long as He is alive, He has only legal right to be Israel's King. He is rightfully Israel's Messiah. He had the right to start the earthly mission long ago promised, and to set up God's kingdom on earth.

Two

After stressing the legal right to the kingship of the Jews, we are told what His work should be.

Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins (1:21).

"His people," or nation, was the Jewish people. No mention is made by the angel in this announcement of any mission to Gentiles. His earthly work primarily was to save the Jews from their sins. It is quite true that He came to save all, but stress is laid here on the Jews first. God's prophetic plan is, first of all, a holy

Jewish nation fitted to become a kingdom of priests in the earth, and afterwards to convert the Gentiles.

Three

In Matthew 5-7 we get the record of what is usually called "The Sermon on the Mount." In this manifesto on the opening of His ministry, our Lord, as King, states His laws for His subjects to obey. The whole atmosphere is Jewish. Appeal is made to the Jewish law which they are to obey.

The Jewish disciples were not to act as Gentiles did. Gentiles made eating, drinking and clothing the chief objects of life. The disciples, however, were to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and all these other things would be added to them.

Four

Later the Lord sent out His twelve apostles on a mission over the land. Their commission is given in Matthew 10. The very first order is not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, "*but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*"

This first mission was to Jews *only*. It was to be only in the land of the Jews, and not even the Samaritans in the land were to be approached. Whatever the Lord's own mission was, He never sent His disciples to Gentiles, or on mission work outside of Israel's land, or outside of the chosen people.

Many today want to find authority to evangelize the world, and are hard put to find it, for their self-appointed task of converting the nations. The Lord's command here is "Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans." This mission of the Twelve certainly gives no warrant for our modern missions. Fancy a modern missionary going out without money, and being told to,

heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. Take no luggage, and make no provision for your journey.

Such directions are utterly opposed to today's practice.

Five

On one occasion our Lord came into contact with a foreigner. She was a woman of Canaan whom the Lord met when on the borders of the land near Tyre and Sidon. She addressed Him as "*Son of David*," and asked for mercy on her daughter grievously vexed with a devil. To her the Lord spoke not a word. She kept on crying out, and the disciples begged that she should be sent away, to which the Lord said,

I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

When the woman took her position as an outcast, the Lord granted her request, even though she had no right as a Gentile to any of the benefits of Messiah's earthly ministry. He was sent only to the Jews. Hence He never preached to foreigners, nor had dealings with them, and never went out of the land.

These are some of the statements and facts as given in the Gospel of Matthew. The Lord's own words are a sufficient answer to our question, that His earthly ministry was to the Jew only.

Six

There are other statements, however, on this point. Let us look at Romans 15:8.

Jesus Christ was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.

This is one of the clearest passages of Scripture about our Lord's earthly ministry. It was the risen Lord's inspired message given to us through Paul. By "*the Circumcision*" is plainly meant the Jewish people. To them our Lord came as a minister to fulfill the truth of God and to confirm the promises made to the Jewish patriarchs. After such a clear statement as this, it is unnecessary to press the point further.

The Lord's earthly ministry was to the Jew to fulfill what God had previously promised. Then this

ministry being to the Jew it was not, of course, to the Gentiles. His earthly mission, though indirectly of great benefit for the Uncircumcision, was not to them. God's plan was "*to the Jew first*," and later to the Gentile (Romans 1:16; 2:10). This later ministry to the nations was not during the Lord's earthly life.

Seven

Let us look also at Hebrews 1:1-2, where we read these words addressed to Hebrews, or Jews, as we generally call them now:

God Who ... spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.

Here again it is plainly stated that the Lord's spoken words were to the Hebrews. The Gentiles are not primarily concerned in this ministry at all. Can words be clearer or more pointed?

Eight

There is also another bit of evidence. Our Lord's ministry was a proclamation of the "*Kingdom of Heaven*." This is explained in Daniel 2:44.

And in the days of these kings [Gentile empires referred to in the preceding verses] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (see also Daniel 7:13-14, 17).

The "*Kingdom of Heaven*" was promised to be on earth, under Messiah, and is to be given to the Jews who shall rule the nations under their King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven will not come until Gentile rule is abolished. So this kingdom is not here yet, for we still have rule by many and different nations.

Messiah must come before the Kingdom of Heaven can be established. Then the prayer "*Thy kingdom come*" will be answered in fact. Today the Kingdom of Heaven is not in existence.

A kingdom connotes three things: a country, its people, and a king. Let any one of these three be absent, and there is no kingdom. So the Lord must come to earth again before this promised kingdom can be established. This Kingdom of Heaven promised long ago, and often, is Jewish and shall be world-wide.

The Lord was rejected at His first coming. His proclamation was not accepted by His own nation, nor was it accepted either when made again to the nation by the apostles as recorded in the Acts. So it is deferred until our Lord returns in power.

Meanwhile, as we read in the last chapter of Acts, “salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles.” In the interval the Body of Christ is being formed and, when completed, will be taken up to be with the Lord, and after that the Lord will come to earth again to establish the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Lord's ministry, and that of the apostles who followed Him, being a proclamation and offer of the Kingdom of Heaven, and this kingdom being Jewish, is an added proof of the objects of the Lord's earthly mission.

This fact is of tremendous importance to us. Every believer should be clear and precise on this point.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Take the *Sermon on the Mount*. It is the code of laws given by the King for the subjects of His kingdom; but until the kingdom exists the laws cannot be enforced nor do they suit.

When the kingdom comes the *Sermon on the Mount* will be the principles to be obeyed by all. Until that day it results in confusion to interpret these laws as being for today.

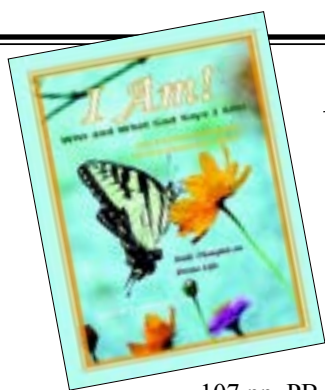
So it is with our Lord's teaching generally. The special statements belong to a time when the kingdom will be set up and not before.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The commission that the Lord gave in Matthew 28 is not for today. It is for the millennium when the Lord's people, the Jews, will have to teach and discipline all nations, and the Lord will be with them on the earth all the time.

To take this as a commission for today results in confusion. There is no mention of the gospel in it at all. So it is with the other commissions given in the Gospels.

The commissions for us are found in Paul's epistles. Today our mission is to evangelize and not to govern the nations. ▶



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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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WATER BAPTISM

Then there is the vexed question of water baptism. This was a Jewish rite and is usually translated “washing” in the “Old Testament.” A Jew who broke the law had to bring a sacrifice to God and be baptized before approaching God.

John the Baptist introduced it as a rite significant of acceptance of the Messiah. No person could enter the kingdom without the rite of water baptism. Now, however, spiritual baptism into our Lord makes us members of His Body, and water baptism is no longer of any use. To perform this command of the law now is to *fall from grace* (Galatians 5:4).¹

Lastly, there is, in Scripture, guidance for living. For

1. *Falling from grace* used to be a phrase applied to one whose conduct contradicted his profession. The reformed drunkard was said to fall from grace if he took to his cups again. It was freely used of so-called “backsliders,” and carried with it the loss of salvation. But, of course, all of this is entirely foreign to the context where it is found in the Scriptures. The Galatians did not lose their salvation, but their liberty (Galatians 5:1-4). They still remained brethren. They had the spirit (Galatians 3:2-3). They were disturbed, but not lost. All of us fail in doctrine or deportment. This, however, does not affect that which we have in grace. It was only in their thoughts and practices that the Galatians fell out of grace. Failure in these can only make it abound. In law failure is fatal, but grace is stimulated and multiplied by failure. – A.E. Knoch (1874-1965), *Unsearchable Riches*, Volume 31

the Jewish disciples, that guidance is in the Gospels. For the members of Christ’s Body today it is collected in the exhortations given us by our Lord from Heaven, found in the latter portions of Paul’s epistles.

The laws found in the Gospels do not suit us today; the entreaties in Paul’s epistles suit us exactly and cover every detail of our daily life.

All Scripture is *for* us, but it is not all *about* us. Leave to the Jews what belongs to them. Then there will be no confusion and no difficulty.

— *Unsearchable Riches*, Volume 13
(*edited*)

Professor Broad was an associate of Dr. E.W. Bullinger, contributor to *Things To Come* magazine, and assisted him in preparing the *Companion Bible*. He was an Oxford graduate who had a long teaching career. He helped start and was a staff member at Mt. Royal College. Broad specialized in Bible studies and was one of the translators of the *Twentieth Century New Testament* and contributor to *The Open English Bible*. He lived and ministered in England, Allentown, PA, and British Columbia, Canada.

Major topics: Jesus Christ, Israel, Great Commission, Right Division
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