

GO TO THE LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL

The 12 disciples, named as apostles, were dispatched by Jesus to go forth proclaiming the kingdom as being at hand and doing kingdom miracles, but they were not to go “*into the way of the Gentiles*” or to “*enter a city of the Samaritans*.” Rather, their mission was strictly in relation to Israel!

Matthew 10:5–6 (NKJV)

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.

They were not to head up north to the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon, nor north to the Decapolis, or south into the territory of Samaria, which involved the mixed race of the Samaritans (cf. 2 Kg. 17:24-28; Jn. 4). Rather, they were to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The gospels record three Galilean tours in Jesus’ earthly ministry (cf. Mt. 4:18-20; Matt. 8-11; Matt. 14). In view here is the second tour in which, with help from the 12 apostles, an in-depth canvassing of the entire territory is in view. They were about to saturate Galilee with the KINGDOM message.

But note they were not to go to the Gentiles at all but rather limit their “kingdom ministry” to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The idea of “**lost sheep**” ties back to 9:36 where Jesus looked with compassion on the multitudes because they were distressed and downcast “**like sheep having no shepherd**.” Characteristically, they had no faithful spiritual leaders to guide them into the truth!

The intentional concern at this point was the lost in Israel and not the Gentiles. Likewise in Matthew 15:24 Jesus said, “***I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel***.” This has troubled some people. Why concern only for the Jews and not also for the Gentiles?

“This restriction of the ministry of the twelve apostles to Israel has caused a great deal of trouble to many students of the Bible, specifically those who fail to hold to the dispensational viewpoint of Bible interpretation.” –

Stanley Toussaint

Dispensationalists believe in a distinction between God’s program for Israel and God’s program for the Church. Many theologians see just one people of God through the ages and therefore call the church “spiritual Israel”.

However, that really is not accurate. The Bible makes these clear distinctions.

Three Biblical Categories of People

Jews (descendants of Abraham through Jacob)

Gentiles (non-Jewish people)

Church (Believers in Christ of both Jew and Gentile background)

1 Corinthians 10:32 (NKJV)

32 Give no offense, either to the **Jews** or to the **Greeks** [Gentiles] or to the **church of God**.

God is a God of order and plan. A person can think whatever they want to think, but in the end, God is God and being God He can do whatever He pleases – and He does. God didn't ask anybody's permission on whether He should choose Israel – He didn't even invite our input. He just did it according to His own good pleasure. The age-old question is: Why did God choose Israel? And the age-old answer is: Because He wanted to.

Lesson number one: This is God's world. He is in charge, and He has a plan of His own devising for His own glory. We have no say in the matter. And it doesn't even matter whether it makes sense to our 3-pound brains. The challenge for us is to align with God's thinking – with His program – not to get Him to align with our thinking! That, by the way, is called REPENTANCE – which means to have a change of mind in which we align our thinking with God's thinking.

Psalm 33:10–11 (NKJV)

10 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.

11 The **counsel of the Lord stands forever**, **The plans of His heart to all generations**.

So here is God's plan as He has revealed it to us in the Holy Scriptures. There is ONE God-chosen nation in the world – and that is Israel. Through the Jews we were given the Scriptures. God gave the covenants (involving relationship) to Israel. The Messiah is Jewish. Jesus said, "**salvation is of the Jews**." (Jn. 4:22). And the kingdom comes through the Jews. This is God's plan!

Remember the context here. Jesus and His apostles are on the scene presenting the KINGDOM to Israel on the condition of repentance. This is prior to the Church Age. It was a time of kingdom presentation, but since Israel rejected her Messiah, the kingdom offer was temporarily withdrawn and is now on hold.

Because Israel rejected her Messiah, God has temporarily set Israel aside and is now doing a brand-new thing called the Church in which He is building a forever family of believers consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

But the context here in Matthew 10 is KINGDOM oriented. The kingdom at this point was “**at hand**” in the sense of being offered to Israel.

The Messiah is Jewish. He is the Jews' Messiah, meaning the special coming One Who would be their Deliverer and Ruler. The Messiah is not coming to Omaha to set up His kingdom. He is coming to Jerusalem. He is coming with reference to Israel.

Luke 1:31–33 (NKJV)

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

The kingdom comes through this special descendant of David – Who we know to be Jesus Christ. It is He Who will occupy the throne of David in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 1:6). But what about this statement: “**He will reign over the house of Jacob forever**”? What about the rest of us? What about the Gentiles? Are they completely left out?

The answer is “NO!” God’s plan all along is that Israel be His channel of blessing for the entire world.

Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)

3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

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s Gentiles accept the Jewish Messiah as Lord and Savior they too have a place of blessing in the kingdom.

Isaiah 49:6 (NKJV)

6 Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

This verse shows that yes, God through His Servant the Messiah is ultimately going to restore Israel, but He is ALSO going to be a light to the Gentiles – which includes us in the Church Age who are Gentile by background.

But the overall point is this: The blessings of the kingdom come to the world in conjunction with Israel accepting her Messiah. The kingdom will not come until Israel accepts Jesus as her Messiah. This is why the emphasis was on Israel at this point. The kingdom was being offered. Yes, God wants to bless the entire world through the Messiah with kingdom blessings – but it is conditioned upon Israel accepting Jesus as her Messiah.

Acts 3:19–21 (NKJV)

19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come [kingdom restoration] 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, [kingdom restoration] which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

What Peter is saying is that kingdom restoration will not come until there is national repentance in Israel.

Jesus told Israel, “**You shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.’**” (Mt. 23:39).

Romans 11:12 (NKJV)

12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

Upon the Jews' rebellion as seen in the rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, God has turned His attention to the world of the Gentiles for the time being in the Church Age. This has resulted in many Gentiles coming to Christ and being spiritually blessed. Israel's loss has turned out to be the Gentile's gain.

If that is true, how much more blessed will the world be when Israel is restored? God's intention is that Israel be a channel of blessing to the world (cf. Gen. 12:3) and so, the conversion of Israel will result in even greater blessings to the world when the kingdom is ushered in.

So, in the plan of God the kingdom comes through Israel. And for this reason, at this point in His ministry when the kingdom was being offered, the emphasis was singularly on Israel – to see what their response would be.

Of course, God, knowing all things, knew what their response would be – but it was indeed a legitimate offer.

God wants to bless the entire world, but invariably He does that through and in conjunction with Israel. They are uniquely His covenant people through whom God's covenant blessings to the world are administered. The Scriptures are Jewish, the Messiah is Jewish, salvation is of the Jews. And the kingdom also comes through the Jews.

The gospel goes first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. This is the order of God's program (cf. Rom. 1:16; Acts 1:8). And who are we to argue? We believers who are Gentile by background are **"grafted in"**. As one Gentile believer was known to sign off in his correspondence, **"Grafted in but Grateful!"**

It's God's world. Salvation is according to God's plan. The kingdom is according to God's plan. Apostolic calling is according to God's plan. 1 Cor. 12:18 says, **"God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased."** God is in charge of the whole entire plan, of which the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the centerpiece of it all.

Have you seen the truth of Jesus Christ? Have you adjusted your thinking to God's truth concerning His Son? It all comes down to Jesus! He is the promised Messiah who ultimately will bring in the kingdom. He is the Savior of all who believe in Him. He died for all our sins. He arose again as Lord over all! This is the gospel of Jesus Christ! And all who believe it will one day share in His kingdom.

Lost sheep need to be found! Jesus the good Shepherd came to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19:10). Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."** (Jn. 10:11). Jesus said those who BELIEVE in Him are His sheep (cf. Jn. 10:25-26). In John 10:27-

28, Jesus said, ***“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life...”***.

Have you heard His voice? The Bible says that the Holy Spirit says, ***“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”*** (Heb. 3:7-8). If you hear the voice of Christ calling you through the truth of Scripture, respond in faith today. The Bible says, ***“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”*** (2 Cor. 6:2).

God’s promise in Romans 10:13 is that whoever in faith calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Have you called? He is waiting! Do it today! Time is of the essence, and eternity is on the line. In faith from your heart, call on Jesus to be your Savior and Lord! Respond to His voice, and He will give you eternal life!

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved! (Acts 16:31).