

Biblical Foundations for Missions: Seven Clear Lessons

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There are many Old Testament texts which address the heathen peoples directly. The general tone of these texts is "Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts" (Ps. 96:7-8). This is particularly the case with the Old Testament prophets.

We must consider those prophets who addressed non-Jewish nations exclusively. By far, not only is judgment preached against heathen nations but also salvation through repentance (see Niniveh in Jonah) or through the coming Messiah. God was always the God of all nations, so that He naturally turns to the nations. Israel's particular role was not to hinder salvation for all peoples, for Abraham's calling included the mandate, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). In Abraham, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 18:18).

For this reason, Paul and Barnabas support their evangelization among the Gentile nations (Acts 13:47) with a quote from the book of Isaiah, "It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

Missions in Jonah

In the book of Jonah, God, who created all nations and wants to bring His salvation to all the peoples, demonstrates how He deals with the particularistic attitude of His people Israel, who claimed Him for themselves alone. To be sure, God's covenant with Abraham gave Israel a special position, but only in order to bless all the other nations of the earth (Gen. 18:18). The complete book of Nahum treats God's word to Nineveh (Nahum 1:1, compare with Nahum 1-3).

The book of Jonah begins, as if it were a matter of course, with the command that Jonah proclaim God's word to a heathen city. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it." That the sin of the Gentiles is a sin against God, is also considered obvious, for they too are under the Law of God: "for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:2).

In spite of his disobedience, Jonah confesses to the sailors in which God he believes: "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). He uses the description of God-Creator of heaven and earth-which the Jews preferred when speaking to Gentiles, and which implies God's universal sovereignty over all human beings. (Compare 2 Kings 19:15, Isa. 37:16, 40:12, Jer. 10:11, Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24-25, Rev. 14:6-7).

After that, the sailors, having first prayed "every man to his god" (1:5), then cry to the Lord (see their prayer in 1:14), and even "feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows." (1:16). It is very significant that the book of Jonah reports not only the conversion of the heathen in Nineveh but also that the mariners brought sacrifices and offerings to the true God. In his prayer in the fish's belly (2:2-10), which includes parts of various Psalms, Jonah remembers that, "Those who cling to worthless idols (literally, 'the vapor of emptiness') forfeit the grace that could be theirs,"-the grace that they can only receive from God. Jonah then promises to bring the Lord offerings and vows. (2:9-10).

The command to preach God's message in Nineveh, having been given in Jonah 1:2 and repeated in 3:2, we see that its fulfillment is described with classic terminology of missionary activity: Jonah "proclaimed" and the residents of Nineveh "believed" (3:4-5 NIV). The prophecy of judgment does not contradict the fact that the sermon was intended to be evangelistic. Both Peter in his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-26) and Paul in Athens (Acts 17:14-31), preach judgment only to wait for the reaction of their audience before introducing the theme of grace.

The prophet uses the term "to turn" which is otherwise used to describe Israel's turning from sin to her God. In 3:5-9, the book reports a mass conversion of Gentiles that has few parallels, even in the history of Israel. The report ends with the message of 3:12, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do, and he did it not." Jesus later uses Nineveh's conversion as an accusation against His Jewish contemporaries, "For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation... The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and, behold one greater than Jonah is here" (See Luke 11:30, 32, and Mt 12:41). What a disgrace to Jews: Gentiles are being held up as good examples for them!

Jonah being a good theologian, knew very well that God wanted to be merciful to the heathen Gentiles as well as to Israel. The prophet's anger (4:1) that arose rests on this knowledge, "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." (4:2). It becomes evident here, that Jonah had fled from his evangelistic mission for theological, not from personal reasons! As a Jew, the prophet could not endure the thought of heathen Gentiles, especially their enemies, being treated with the same mercy as Israel.

Using the first verdant and the withered gourd, God however illustrates His relationship to the heathen, and concludes in the final verse with a distinct justification for Old Testament missions, "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (4:11, NIV).

Missions in Joel

The prophet Joel proclaims not only the pending judgment over Israel (Joel 1-2) but also the future judgment upon the heathen Gentiles who oppose His people. In both cases, the prophet speaks of God's grace and salvation and of returning to the Lord. Both sections have the proclamation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Joel 3 in common. This is as significant for the salvation of Israel as it is for all the nations ("all flesh" Joel 2:28). For Peter, this text was fulfilled on Pentecost ("but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). For this reason, he quotes the whole chapter (Acts 2:17-21), beginning with the outpouring of the Spirit with miraculous signs upon "all flesh" (Joel 2:28)-that is, upon Jews and Gentiles alike, upon all men and women, etc., continuing with terrible judgments (2:30-31) and ending with the statement that from this time on, all can be saved by calling on the Lord, and that salvation will come out of Zion (2:32).

When Paul wanted to prove in Romans 10:11-12 that all people, not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, can be saved through faith on Jesus Christ, he quotes not only Isaiah 28:16 "he that believeth shall not make haste," but also the same promise from Joel cited by Peter (Joel 2:32) "whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be delivered"). In 1 Corinthians 1:2, the description that "all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ" is used to define the universal church. Paul assumes in both cases that his audience knows that Joel 2 refers to "all flesh."

Paul adopts not only the meaning of "calling on the name of the Lord" from Joel, but the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as well, for God has "saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost... shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:5-6).

In short, the apostles understood Joel to proclaim world missions, which depend on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as well as on God's grace, which saves all without exception who call upon Him as Lord.

Note that the sermon on Pentecost uses not only this passage out of Joel, but the whole book. Joel prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem (Joel 1-2), which can only be prevented by a thorough conversion of the people and the priests (Joel 2:12-17), for God is "gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:13). Peter's Pentecost sermon is held in the face of judgment pending over Jerusalem, which took place in 70 B.C. Peter exhorts his audience, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40), that is, the generation living in the forty years between Christ's crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem-the last generation which had the opportunity to repent before the great catastrophe, which Jesus had also predicted, "All these things shall come upon this generation" (Mt. 23:36, also "generation" in Mt. 24:34 and 17:17).

World Missions in Daniel

The prophet Daniel is of double significance for worldmissions to all the nations. On the one hand, the events of his book takes place among the heathens and reports that they have heard of the God of Israel on an international scale. On the other hand, Daniel announces prophetically how God will deal with them and that His kingdom will one day include the whole world through the atoning death of His Son.

We see Daniel and his three friends at the Babylonian Court (Dan 1) and, in spite of Chaldean education, they keep the commands of the true and living God (Dan. 1:8-17), and with God's great blessing (Dan. 1:15-20), so that Daniel becomes the third most powerful man in the government of three successive world empires (Dan. 1:2, 2:48-49, 5:29 and 6:3-29).

God reveals himself in a dream to the pagan ruler Nebuchadnezzar-even though the dream could only be interpreted by the "Jewish missionary" Daniel (Dan. 2 and compare the dream in Dan. 4:7-24). The courageous testimony of Daniel's three friends, which brought them into the blessings of the fiery furnace, leads the King to an initial, wonderful confession of the true and living God, the God of Israel, to all the world, (Dan. 3:28-30) "because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Dan. 3:29). Even more wonderful is Nebuchadnezzar's letter (Dan. 4:1-37) to all "people, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth" (Dan, 4:1). In this letter, the most powerful man of his time confesses how God had humiliated him. He begins and ends the document with a magnificent confessions and descriptions of the living God (Dan. 4:1 2. 34-36). "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:1 and 34): "All his works are truth and his ways justice. And those who walk in pride he is able to put down." (Dan. 4:37).

In the same way, God reveals himself to Nebuchadnezzar's heir, Belshazzar (Dan. 5) through a writing on the wall, and continues to do likewise to the Mede, Darius, through Daniel's courageous testimony in the lions' den. Darius also proclaims God's power to the whole world in an official, international "circular" (Dan. 6:25-28). He commands that "in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel...for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his... dominion shall be even unto the end" (Dan. 6:26). Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, Darius emphasizes that Daniel's God "delivereth and rescueth" (Dan. 6:27). The final chapters of Daniel reveal the prophet's own dreams during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus.

During Daniel's lifetime the great world empires had heard at least twice, from the mouths their highest rulers, that the God of Israel is the true God, the most powerful God, the Creator and the only real Saviour! Daniel was one of the most significant and successful missionaries of all history!

God's Worldwide Kingdom

We have assumed that the prophet Daniel was significant for missions to all nations for two reasons: First because the contents of his book takes place among pagans and reports that heathens have heard of the God of Israel on an international scale, and secondly, because Daniel prophetically announces how God would deal with the heathen nations, and that His kingdom will encompass the whole world through the atoning death of the Son of Man.

The future of the world's great empires and the coming of the Son of Man to save mankind are primarily described in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and in the prophet's visions in chapters 7 to 12. Although heathen nations play an important role in other prophecies in the book (Dan. 8), we will discuss here only the prophecies which deal with the relationship between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of God.

Most Bible-believing theologians agree that the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2) and in Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Dan. 7) represent a succession of great world kingdoms; the Babylonians (gold, lion), the Medes and the Persians (silver, bear), the Greeks (copper, panther) and the Romans (iron, terrible beast). Both visions show that God will replace these worldly kingdoms in the period of Roman rule by his own eternal Kingdom-which is to be realized especially in the New Testament Church. The theme that God is the only true Sovereign of the world, and that His Kingdom, not those of human rulers, will last eternally, permeates the whole book of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream ends when the figure is destroyed by a stone, which grows into a "great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35 and 45), Daniel explains, "In the days of those kings 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" (Dan. 2:44). The age of world empires will therefore end with the Romans, the Kingdom of God will be established during the period of Roman rule and grow, until it fills the whole earth. This kingdom will not be taken over by any other nation, either by those mentioned in the text or by the Jews-as the statement, "shall not be left to another people" is interpreted by many. Jesus-beginning with the disciples and the Church-had indeed established His Kingdom during the Roman period, and in many parables had already announced that the Kingdom would grow until it filled the earth (see Mt. 13:24-35).

Daniel interprets the end of the worldly kingdoms represented by the beasts in the same way (Dan. 7:9-14 and Dan. 7:26-27). God decides from His throne to end the empires (Dan. 7:9-12). This occurs when the Son of Man (Jesus' own designated name) ascends to Heaven and there receives "dominion and glory, and a kingdom" from God, so that "all people, nations and languages, should serve him" (Dan. 7:14), and this kingdom will be eternal (Dan. 7:14). "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given

to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (7:27).

In the context of the prophecy of the establishment of an eternal kingdom, including all peoples, Daniel 9:24-27 is significant, although its interpretation is disputed. In my opinion, this concerns the time between the reconstruction of Jerusalem (vs 24, 25) and the crucifixion of Jesus ("to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and the prophecy and to anoint the most Holy," vs 24, "shall Messiah be cut off vs 26, the cessation of the sacrifices, vs 9:27). The period of time between the events is set at 490 years (70 year-weeks of 7 years per week), which fits arithmetically, in any case. Not until the elimination of Messiah does a prince destroy the holy city (vs 26), which initiates the "end" (vs 26) of the age of the Jews. This occurred in 70 B.C., when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman Emperor, (vs 27 repeats vs 26 chronologically). "He" in vs 27 would therefore be the messiah, the "Abomination of desolation" the destruction of the Temple, (see Mt. 24:15).

O.T. Foundations for N.T. Missions

Although the apostles spoke of Jesus' commandment several times after Pentecost, (Acts 1:2, 10:42), they never cited the Great Commission as such, (Mt. 28:18-20. Mk. 16:15-16). Did the early church agree on preaching the Gospel to all peoples so that there was no need to mention Christ's command? On the contrary, missions to the Gentiles began very slowly and was for a long time a controversial matter. Take the Apostolic Council in Acts 15 and the Epistle to the Galatians as examples.

In studying the New Testament and discussions on the justification of missions, we discover that wherever we would have quoted the Great Commission, the apostles referred to the Old Testament. The Great Commission is the fulfillment of the New Testament, a signal that the long-announced plan was to be set into action. The letter to the Romans, particularly Chapter 15 is an obvious and clear example.

The promise made to the patriarchs, that all nations would be blessed in them (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14) is also used repeatedly to support the evangelization of non-Jewish peoples (Lk. 1:54-55 and 72; Acts 3:25-26; Rom. 4:13-25; Eph. 3:3-4; Gal. 3:79+14; Heb. 6:13-20; 11:12).

Several examples will demonstrate that New Testament world-wide missions were based on Old Testament foundations. For instance, in Acts 13:46-49, Paul and Barnabas, having been rejected by the Jews in Antioch, explain their decision to preach to the Gentiles in the future by citing Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47) "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

James uses Amos 9:11-12 in his closing speech at the Apostolic Council to justify Paul's right to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-2; Isa. 61:4; Ps. 22:27-28; Zech. 8:22). He believes the Church to be the "tabernacle of David that is fallen," which will join the remnant of Judah with the heathen Gentiles.

Peter combines the Great Commission with a reference to the Old Testament as an argument for his preaching the Gospel to Cornelius. "And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:42-43).

For this reason, we are not surprised that the Great Commission takes on a different form in Luke than in Matthew and Mark, and that Jesus' command in Luke is derived directly from the Old Testament. In Luke 24:43-49, Jesus says to the disciples, "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins, should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." According to Jesus' own words, all parts of the Old Testament speak not only of His coming, as well as of the cross and the resurrection, but also of world missions that forgiveness must be preached to all the nations.

Missions in John

When studying the significance of missionary thought in the Gospel of John, there are four points to note:

1. Missio Dei

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' sending of His disciples into the world is understood to be a continuation of His commission from His Father (about fifty times in John, the first time 3:17, esp. 10:16, 17:18,21 and 23, compare 14:31) and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Jesus (John 14:26, 15:26, Luke 24:49). For this reason, John uses the same word, 'to send', (Latin: (missio) both times. In John 17:18-23, Jesus says, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." In John 20:21, He changes this phrase into a personal address. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." In His prayer for the disciples of chapter 17, He reports to His Father that He has given them God's Word, and has prepared them to carry the message to the world.

2. John as an Evangelistic Tract

Much attention has been paid to this gospel's character as an evangelistic tract, that is, as a text for people who have not yet come to believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as Savior and light of the world. We cannot consider here the discussion between Wilhelm Oehler, who held this gospel to have been written for the world, that is, for the non-Jew, or for Israel, as Karl Bornhauser interprets it. "I believe that John's emphasis on Jesus' coming for the whole world, as light of the world, etc., supports the theory that it was intended to be a 'tract for the heathen'." (Point 4 below).

3. Non-Jews in the Gospel of John

After Jesus' long discussion with Nicodemus, a representative of Jewish spirituality (John 3:1-26), John had no qualms to continue with a long conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). While John does not tell us how Nicodemus reacted to Jesus' words, the depiction of the incident at the well ends with the confession of a whole Samaritan city, "that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Jesus had made it clear to the woman, that with His coming, the question of where one was to worship God had become insignificant, but that "the true worshipper," should worship Him in "spirit and in truth," therefore providing the possibility that the Gentiles who lived far away from Jerusalem could now worship God just as the Jews could.

4. The Whole "World" as Object

John's strong emphasis that Jesus is not only the Savior of the Jews, but of all peoples, and that the disciples, as His ambassadors, were to preach the Gospel to all nations, becomes particularly apparent when one observes all occurrences of the word "world."

The usage of "world" with but few exceptions, (see 12:19, for example) always means either the whole of human creation or all those who rebel against God.

We have already examined a few texts in which Jesus proclaims that His Father had sent Him into the world, and that He now sends His disciples into the world. A close look at the context of the central role of the 'Missio Dei' shows how strongly both Jesus and John wish the whole world to believe in Jesus Christ. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word: That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou has sent me... that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (17:18-23).

That Jesus' commission is meant not only for Israel, but for the "world" is further developed by the repeated insistence that Jesus' significance in His offices (king, priest, prophet, Son of God, Christ, sacrificial lamb), His properties (truth) and in the central imagery (bread, light) is intended for the whole world.

John emphasizes most often that Jesus is the "light of the world" (in Jesus' description of Himself, 8:12, 9:5, similarly in 1:9,3:19, 11:9, 12:46). Jesus says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (8:12). At the very beginning of the gospel, John, speaking of the 'Word', that is of Jesus, says, "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him and the world knew him not" (1:9-10).

Jesus tells Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (18:37). John emphasizes repeatedly that Jesus had come into the "world"-into the creation rebelling against God on the one hand, and all people, not just to Israel,

on the other. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world" (16:28). Jesus is the bread that comes from heaven, so that men may live eternally, for He will give His body "for the life of the world" (6:51). The divine bread which has come down from heaven "giveth life unto the world." (6:33). Jesus is the "Christ" and the "Son of God" "who should come into the world" (11:27) as Martha confesses and believes. He is the prophet that "should come into the world" (6:14). He has come to judgment (9:39), although He has not come to judge, but to save the world (12:47). His well-known words to Nicodemus underline this idea, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved" (3:16-17).

Nor does John the Baptist's early confession concern only the Jews. Although this term, 'the lamb', calls to mind a central Old Testament thought, nevertheless John says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Like the confession of the Samaritans, Jesus is "indeed the Savior of the world" (4:42).

The activity of the Holy Spirit concerns the whole world when Jesus promises the Spirit's coming and the success of world missions. "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (16:8).

Missions in Matthew

The classic Great Commission (Mt. 28,16-20) is not only the end of the Gospel of Matthew, it is really its climax and its goal. For this reason, Matthew emphasizes from the first chapter on, that the Good News is for the heathen Gentiles. That this particular Gospel, written for Jewish Christians-as the the book itself demonstrates, and as the early Church unanimously reports-should so emphasize missions, demonstrates that, beginning with his birth, the earthly Jesus was already the Salvation of the Gentiles, of all the nations.

According to Mt. 5:14, Christ's disciples are "the salt of the world," that is of the cosmos, not only of the Jewish homeland, as in the case of "the salt of the land (or of the earth)" in Mt. 4:13. Similarly, the "field" which God sows in Mt. 13:38 is the whole "world." "This gospel shall be preached in the whole world" (Mt. 26:13).

The harvest in Mt. 9:37-38 is great, so that the disciples must ask God for more laborers, for "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14).

In Mt. 25:31-46, when the heathen nations appear before the throne of the Son of Man, some are lost and others saved (the "blessed of My Father", vs 34). For this reason, the disciples will "be hated of all nations" (Mt. 24:9).

In chapter 12:18-21, Matthew quotes a prophecy from Isaiah (Isa. 4:1-4) that the Messiah will "show judgment to the Gentiles" and that "in his name shall the Gentiles trust." (Compare a similar quote Isa. 8:23 and 9:1, Mt. 4:13-17.)

The "nations", whom Mt. 28:18 describes as recipients of the proclamation of the Gospel, have therefore already been mentioned in the whole book. (Approximately half of the examples of the word Gentiles or nations in Matthew have been mentioned.)

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus in 1:1-7 mentions women who were Gentiles! The Canaanite Tamar (Mt. 1:3. Gen. 38) and the Hittite Bathseba (in Mt. 1:6, who merely is called "the wife of Uria" rather than naming her by name, because she was a Hittite were cases of adultery. Two of the women, however, were Gentiles who had come to believe in the living and true God of Israel. The former prostitute, Rahab, (Mt. 1:5) had made a covenant with the Israelite spies and was saved from the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 2). Because she had taken the God of Israel to be her own God, she could be married to Salma (Mt. 1:5). Ruth (Mt 1:4) had been born a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4), and had thus been cut off from the fellowship with the people of God (Deut. 23:4). Because, however, of her vow, "thy people shall be my people and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16), she was able to marry Boas and become the best-known ancestress of David and of Jesus.

What an affront to Matthew's Jewish contemporaries, to find heathen women in Jesus' genealogical table! He must have mentioned them on purpose, in order to show that the very purpose of Israel's history was to bring salvation and blessing to the Gentiles! (Compare Gen. 12:3 and 18:18).

While Luke, a Gentile, mentions the Jewish shepherds in the Christmas story as the first visitors to the newborn Saviour of the world (Lk. 2), Matthew ignores them and reports the journey of the heathen Wise Men of the East, who believed, unlike the educated Jewish scribes, and travelled to Bethlehem to worship him (2:1-12).

That Gentiles were often more likely to believe than were the Jews, is a story with an unbroken thread in Matthew. The following examples must have been as insulting to his Jewish readers as Jesus' own statements were to his hearers. Jesus had to flee his homeland and seek refuge in Egypt of all places . (2:13-15)! In 4:13-17 the writer reports that Jesus began his call to repentance in heathen Galilee, in order to fulfill the prophecy in Isa. 28:23 and 9:2, that "the people who walked in great darkness" that is, in the above mentioned Gentile territory, "have seen a great light"-Jesus (Mt. 4:15-16).

Mt. 8:5-13 describes a heathen centurion, who has come to believe in Jesus, of whom Jesus says: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (vs 10) and adds, that many people from the far corners of the earth will feast with the patriarchs in Heaven, while many Jews ("children of the kingdom") will be cast out (vs 12-13).

Shortly afterwards, Matthew reports that Jesus said of the Jewish cities that rejected His messengers (Mt. 10:15), "Verily. I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city." A similar statement may be found in the following chapter (Mt. 11:20-24) for Tyre and Sidon, symbols of paganism as were Sodom and Gomorrha, would have repented, had Jesus done such miracles there as He had done in Jewish cities.

In Mt. 15:21-28, Jesus is on Gentile territory again and meets a believing Canaanite woman, who is willing to be satisfied with Israel's leftovers and the Messiah. In Mt. 16:4, Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the "sign of Jonah" that had been understood by the Gentiles (see "Missions in Jonah" above).

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16), the Jews would seem to be the first who are last and the Gentiles to be the last who are first. This idea is repeated more strongly in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (21:33-46), in which the vineyard is taken from the original tenants, the Jews, and given to others, the Gentiles (21:41-43), as the chief priests had to realize to their own condemnation.

This message recurs again in the parable of the wedding guests (22:1-4), for here the original guests, the Jews, are rejected in favor of the people from the highways, the Gentiles, who certainly did not belong there.

The message that the Gentiles could be grafted onto the olive tree of Israel's salvation history through the cutting off of the Jews (Rom 11:11-24)-which does not contradict the doctrine of the repentance of Israel in the future-had, therefore, been preached by Jesus again and again. Matthew demonstrating that faith is the essential factor, not nationality, held up the mirror of the Gospel to and for the whole world to his Jewish contemporaries.

Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, who holds the Th.D degree in missiology and a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology, is director of the Institut für Welt-mission and Gemeindebau German Center for World Mission and teaches missions and comparative religion at the Free Evangelical School of Theology FETA, in Basel, Switzerland. He is a missionary with Gospel Recordings Int'l.