

TO WHOM DID JESUS COME?

Jesus came to redeem man from the curse of the law (Galatians 4:4). The curse of the law is death (Romans 6:16, 23; 7:11) and Jesus is life (John 1:4; 14:6), even the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15). The Bible teaches that Jesus calls all men to him (John 3:16; Revelation 22:17) for he is the water of life (John 4:10). There is great comfort in the knowledge that Jesus loved us enough to come and die for us (Romans 5:8) so that we might have eternal life (John 10:28; Titus 1:2). But some argue that we should not contend that Jesus' message is for all men. Instead, they claim, Jesus came only to the Jews of Israel. All that he taught, prior to the cross, was intended for the Jews and must not be taught as New Testament doctrine. This brother incorrectly draws a line carefully excluding Jesus' teaching on a subject which is evidently offensive to him; namely, marriage, divorce and remarriage. Let's see what the Bible says about Jesus and the validity of his teachings today.

Prophecy declared that Jesus would come to save all men who would be obedient to his word. In Genesis 3:15, we find the promise of a redeemer. The promise is made to the world in general for there was no Israel at that time. Satan would be defeated and men would be released from the bondage of sin. Isaiah makes plain that a savior would come to the Gentiles. Consider Isaiah 11:10: "*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.*" The prophet declares that one will come who will be a "*light to the Gentiles*" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6, 22; 60:3;). Jesus would come through the nation of Israel but his mission was never limited to the Jews. We may therefore conclude that the Gentiles were always part of his ultimate vision for the salvation of mankind.

Once Jesus was born, his parents brought him to Jerusalem where an old man, "*just and devout,*" named Simeon was waiting. There, Simeon declared by the Holy Spirit that Jesus would be a "*light to lighten the Gentiles*" (Luke 2:32; c.f. Luke 2:25-25). Later, as Jesus continued his ministry, he would himself declare that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy found in Isaiah 9:2 and 60:1-3. Jesus says of his journey into Gentile territory was "*that it might be fulfilled...*" (Matthew 4:14). The fulfilled prophecy speaks again of Jesus as a "*great light*" (Matthew 4:16) to the Gentile people. We may therefore conclude that Jesus himself understood that he was to preach to the Gentiles as well.

But did Jesus actually teach anything other than Mosaic law before his crucifixion? The men who wrote the Gospels were writing a "New Testament" (2 Corinthians 3:6). The earliest of the writers penned their Gospels at least 10-15 years (probably more) *after* the church had been established. These men were writing letters to Christians for the purpose of building and sustaining their faith in Jesus Christ.

Just hours before his death, Jesus promised his Apostles the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Spirit would "*bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you*" (John 14:26). Why? If Jesus' teachings were just restatements of Old Testament doctrine, why employ the power of the Holy Spirit to bring these doctrines to mind? The answer is evident. The teachings of Jesus were intended for the New Testament Christians.

Additionally, the Hebrew writer declares that God now speaks to us through his Son (Hebrews 1:2). Is it reasonable to conclude that God only speaks to us through his son when the son is working through the Holy Ghost and not when the Son himself speaks? We think not.

While it is unquestionable that Jesus was a Jew, that he lived under Law of Moses and that he demanded the proper keeping of the law, it is also true that Jesus looked forward to the coming of the church and began, while upon earth, to preach truth and doctrine that would underlie and govern that church.

Consider Jesus' own teachings, prior to his crucifixion, that lie entirely outside Mosaic law. Matthew records Jesus' baptism by John. There was no such requirement under Mosaic law yet Jesus complied "*to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus said "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*" (Mark 1:15). In Judaism, the gospel was, at best, a distant hope. Yet Jesus demands that his hearers "*believe the gospel.*" In both cases, very early in his ministry, Jesus was teaching differently from the law of Moses. Those who foolishly trouble the brotherhood by declaring Jesus' teachings Mosaic only must contend with these two occasions in which Jesus' message was different from that of Moses but consistent with the message of Pentecost.

One of the greatest differences between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ is that Moses' law could never forgive sins while Christ's law could. In Luke 7 we read of an occasion where Jesus forgave the sins of a sinful woman at Simon's house. Jesus declares that her sins are forgiven (Luke 7:48) and the people marvel that this man (Jesus) could forgive sins (Luke 7:49). If all of Jesus' teaching before the cross was Mosaic, where did he find authority to forgive sins?

John also records pre-crucifixion Christian teachings. In John 3 we find Jesus conversing with Nicodemus and declaring that a man "*must be born again*" (John 3:5-7). Occurring some three years before his crucifixion and the coming of the church, this commandment of rebirth knows no Mosaic parallel. In the Jewish economy, a man became one of God's chosen people by birth, nothing else was required to establish his place among the nation. (Of course he must do certain things to remain faithful to the covenant but a normal birth was all that was required to secure his place as a Jew.). But here Jesus demanding a rebirth. Certainly this was not Jewish teaching. It was New Testament doctrine.

There are many other similar examples throughout the Gospels but this should suffice to show the error of those who wish to remove Jesus' earthly teachings from our doctrine today. Jesus taught New Testament doctrine through his example as well as through his words. As Paul said, let us rightly divide the word (2 Timothy 2:15) for "*it is profitable for doctrine...*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Bryant Evans