

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Adult Bible Class Studies

17th September 2006

Read: Galatians 4: 1-6

An Introduction to the New Testament

No.3, Matters in Place for the NT

In our last study it was noted that there were certain conditions already in place for the introduction & establishment of NT Christianity in the 1st century. We noted three of these conditions, the last of which was the synagogue system of the Jews. Throughout Palestine and many other nations there was already in existence a network of synagogues, places of Jewish worship that provided the NT Church with an immediate opportunity of preaching the message of Christ.

For quite some time the synagogue system had been in place. See Psalm 74: 8 where it is said that the enemies of God “*have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.*” The Hebrew word for “synagogue” means *an appointed place of meeting*. Note that there was a plurality of them at the time in view in this psalm which would have been around 1000 BC. Thus, for a long time these appointed places of meeting were found throughout Israel; and there the teaching of God’s word would have taken place. This synagogue system in later times was taken by the Jews into other lands outside of Israel.

THE DISPERSION

Incidentally, in referring to the synagogue system it is most interesting to see that it was established in lands and cities outside Israel as a result of the *Dispersion* – i.e. the dispersing or scattering of Jews all over the Greco-Roman world of that era. See John 7: 35 where reference is made to “*the dispersed among the Gentiles.*” The word for “dispersed” signifies *that which is sown or scattered throughout*. The reference is to the Jews who had been displaced out of their own nation and had been dispersed in various lands. See also James 1: 1 – “*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.*” Here the same word is used describing the Jewish dispersion. Note here that reference is made to all twelve tribes! In other words, the twelve tribes were still in existence and retained their identity in that members of them had been scattered throughout various places. Cf. Acts 26: 7 – these references show the folly of *British Israelism* with its false theory of the lost tribes of Israel! See also 1 Pet 1: 1 – here is the same term accompanied by the word “sojourners”. In the original Greek text, it reads “*to the elect sojourners of the dispersion.*” Peter is writing to the elect within the dispersed Jews; and note how he proceeds to refer to certain areas where they were scattered or dispersed – “*Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*”

The causes of this dispersion of Jewish people were various. Some had been taken captive by force – such as in the captivity of the northern kingdom under the Assyrian Empire, 2 Kings 17: 23. Others fled from Israel because of war, invasion & famine, Jer chs 42&43 – where there is a record of a flight of Jews into Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. Others no doubt would have emigrated as a result of the development of the Greco-Roman world. But whatever the causes were, by the 1st century the Dispersion had become very widespread, with large Jewish populations in various lands and cities.

DISPERSION PROVIDED A FOUNDATION FOR NT CHRISTIANITY

The synagogue system found throughout the regions populated by the dispersed Jews provided centres of teaching & instruction based on the OT Scriptures. We noted this fact in some passages in Acts; but see also Luke 4: 16 – the language shows that the synagogue system was an established practice, observed by Christ Himself. It was His custom to go into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath; and it was also the custom to have the reading of the OT Scriptures, with Christ on this occasion actually the one who read the portion. Thus the practice of reading the OT was clearly established and observed within the synagogue system.

In this way a marvellous system was already in place for NT Christianity in that through the reading and the knowledge of the OT, great & fundamental truths were already known & held by the synagogue worshippers. Keep in mind that in many of these cities in various lands, not only did Jews attend the synagogues, so also did Gentiles who had become proselytes to the Jewish faith. Thus, for the introduction of the NT Christianity there was a ready-made audience, grounded and established in certain truths.

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE GOSPEL ALREADY IN PLACE

In other words, in the religious system of the Jewish synagogue, the presuppositions of the Gospel were already established. The doctrines of *the being of God, creation, the fall of man, the entrance of sin, the coming judgment, the infallibility of the Scriptures* – all of these truths were already in place in the minds at least of synagogue worshippers. Thus, at the inception of NT Christianity, the Lord and the Apostles did not have to begin at the very beginning as far as knowledge and instruction are concerned. The way for the Gospel was in place.

THE GREAT GOSPEL PROMISE KNOWN

Furthermore, not only had these presuppositions of the Gospel been established within Israel’s religious system, but the very heart of the Gospel had been proclaimed also in the form of the great messianic promise.

That promise had been given from the very beginning; from the time that man fell, thus when the need for such a promise was created by the entrance of sin into the human race. The promise was that the woman’s seed

would bruise the serpent's head, Gen 3: 15. That was the promise; that was the beginning of the Gospel; and the rest of the OT contains the unfolding of that great promise and the hope it presented to man. In the O.T. there are only a few occasions when the term "messiah" is clearly and directly applied to the Messiah – but there are a few nonetheless. Note them --

(a) 1 Sam 2: 10 where Hannah speaks of "*His anointed...*" i.e. God's anointed, the original Hebrew word meaning *the messiah*. Notice in this verse that the Messiah is also spoken of as 'His king' and the reference with respect to time is future, speaking of the final judgment. Put together, these details point to Christ the anointed King, the Messiah King, dealing in judgment with the ungodly.

(b) Psalm 2: 2 – this is clearly an application of the term to Christ by referring to the conspiracy of human rulers against Jehovah and "His anointed." See Acts 4: 25-27 where in v.26 the words are quoted and are applied directly to the Saviour. Note the N.T. rendering "*against the Lord and against His Christ.*" Note also in v.27 the direct statement with respect to the anointing of God's Son – "*thy holy child Jesus.*"

(c) Dan 9: 25, 26 where the term "Messiah" is employed twice and in each instance there is no doubt that the reference is to the Christ of the New Testament.

Consequently, the Gospel promise of a Messiah was presented constantly to the OT Church so that when the fulfilment came in the person & work of Christ, NT Christianity could point to Him as the fulfilment of the hope of the fathers. See John 1: 41 where Andrew very positively states "*We have found the Messiah.*" Then in John 4: 25 the woman of Samaria stated "*I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ.*" At that point the woman was being dealt with by the Lord, though she still did not recognise who He was. But she knew enough of the O.T. Scriptures to know that there was one promised who would come as the Messiah; and the Lord then proceeded to reveal Himself to her, v.26, with v.29 then recording her marvellous response to the revelation given to her. In other words, the woman was led to the point where she was enabled to recognise that the one who exposed her sin was actually the Messiah. Note her words – "*Is not this the Christ?*" Here she uses the Greek N.T. equivalent of the Hebrew O.T. word 'messiah'. Over 500 times in the New Testament the title "Christ" is applied to Jesus of Nazareth indicating that the Church recognised Him as the fulfilment of the messianic promises of the OT.

Note how Paul, for example, spoke of the promise of the Messiah in such a fashion as to show that it had been the ancient & established hope of God's OT saints. See Acts 13: 32, 33 & Acts 26: 6-8 where Paul's language shows that *the promise* of the OT era was that of the Messiah and it was fulfilled in Christ, confirmed especially by His resurrection from the dead.

Rev. John Greer