

*I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.*

(Luke 12: 49-51)

*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

(Ephesians 4: 11-13)

## **2011, Anno Domini: The Lesson of Ruth (New Teaching and, with it, Division)**

A little more than a hundred years ago, physicists thought they were just about there. Sir Isaac Newton's Law of Gravity had held up for two centuries, formulas had been derived from it that were working quite well (and still are today), and researchers figured that all they needed was a few more calculations, and the universe would be all figured out. And then, first in 1905 and again in 1916, some fellow named Einstein – who wasn't even employed by a university or laboratory, but was working as a clerk in a patent office in Bern, Switzerland – published two papers on the Special and General Theory of Relativity that upset the entire apple cart, as it were. Einstein's radical way of looking at how light behaves (which opened the doorway for the field of Quantum Mechanics) brought scientists to thinking that there was so much more to the universe than anyone realized. Gravity explained the behavior of objects people could see with the naked eye – planets, stars, galaxies, etc. – but did not take into account the world we could not see, that of atoms and sub-atomic particles, which Quantum Mechanics does explain rather well. (There are difficulties in trying to tie the two theories together to explain *everything*, but that's another topic.) Perhaps it wasn't so much an *apple* that legend says dropped on the head of Newton, but an *onion*; one with multiple layers that need to be peeled off, one by one, in order to see everything about it.

A similar radical shift is taking place in how we see the Kingdom of Heaven. In this case, however, the shift is not found in something never seen or suspected before, but in something the Church discarded millennia before and is only now *rediscovering* as relations between two peoples who share one covenant with God begin to heal. This teaching does not replace what has come before, but builds upon it to reveal more about the Kingdom and how it operates – and will operate through eternity – than ever before. This is from God, who wants believers to grow in Him, not just for eternity but for the here and now as well, in order to advance the Kingdom as the time grows short for the return of the Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, as this division heals, the new teaching will bring another division to the Church – but not to the Body of Christ (there is going to be a difference emerging) – as believers will be faced with a choice; learn the lesson of Ruth

from Moab and move on and grow in God, or cling to the comfortable and familiar but lose out on God's great next act.

The teaching in question comes from the Jewish people's understanding of God, which believers are now rediscovering thanks to the Messianic movement in Judaism. As more of God's covenant people recognize and accept Yeshua (Jesus) as the "anointed one" (Messiah) prophesied in Scripture, Messianic believers are bringing their understanding of the Law and the Prophets (the *Tanakh*) to bear on Christianity itself. These believers are also teaching points of Scripture that up until now have been hidden from the eyes of a Church that has been predominantly Gentile in its outlook for at least 1,500 years.

Faith in Yeshua began as "The Way" (refer to the Book of Acts), originally regarded as a sect of Judaism, and the first disciples were almost exclusively Jewish. As Gentiles entered the Kingdom, frictions began to emerge as cultures clashed and questions emerged over how much of the Gentile way of living had to be abandoned in order to accept Yeshua's offer of Salvation through His sacrifice (Acts 15). Believers who came from the Pharisee sect of Judaism insisted that Gentiles must first be made to follow the Law of Moses before coming to Salvation. We must remember that there were Gentiles who were attracted by the righteousness of God to the faith, some becoming outright converts. This is something that had been going on long before the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost referred to in Acts chapter two; in fact, there is an entire book in the Old Testament that deals with one such instance of a Gentile convert to the God of Israel – that of Ruth from Moab.

In condensed form, Ruth and Orpah were the daughters-in-law of Naomi, who came with her husband and two sons to Moab years before during a famine in Israel. Naomi's husband and both sons died in Moab, and Naomi was preparing to return to Israel, releasing her daughters-in-law to find new husbands and carry on with their lives. Orpah stayed behind; Ruth, however, loved Naomi so much that she walked away from her Moabite heritage to stay with her: "Your people will be my people and your God my God," as recorded in Ruth 1:16. Despite the fact that people from Moab were to be excluded for a period from the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3), Ruth learned the ways of the Lord and His people, Israel. God honored Ruth's devotion to Himself and Naomi and provided for the family in every way.

The "Law First, Then Grace" policy was rejected by the Apostle Peter and the early Church. In Acts 15:10, Peter explained that even the Jewish people could not keep all the Law, hence the need for the sacrificial system and, ultimately, the Messiah's own sacrifice for all time. Peter reminded them of the incident (recorded in Acts 14) of the Holy Spirit coming on the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household as Peter told them about Jesus. It was, therefore, decided that the Church should not add hurdles for Gentiles to accept Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers had – just stay clear of eating blood, meat from strangled animals, food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality.

As the Church grew, however, the Gentiles took over, to the point where the Church was increasingly Gentile in its outlook and a rift was emerging between the Church and the Jewish culture and heritage it was born into. The rift deepened by 132-135 A.D. as the second Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire occurred and the revolt's leader, Simon bar Kokhba, was proclaimed to be the Messiah. Only a few believers

fought with Israel in the failed rebellion, and resentments over the revolt built on both sides until the split was later formalized and Christianity and Judaism were recognized as two separate, distinct faiths.

All this had been prophesied by Jesus and the “Time of the Gentiles” referred to by Him in Luke 21:24 had to take place. But there are differences between how things were handled by the Gentiles in the Church and Ruth, recorded in Scripture as a kind of “prototype” Gentile coming into the Kingdom of God. Ruth came to the knowledge of God through Naomi; she left behind her Moabite heritage and (as far as Scripture records) did not try to cling to it, especially where faith was concerned. Ruth obeyed what she had been taught of the Lord by her mother-in-law wholeheartedly, even when it came to placing her future happiness into His hands. There was no, *O.K., you want me to do what? Go to the threshing floor, Wait until he’s asleep, uncover his feet and then lie down till he wakes up? And then, I ask him for the marriage? Wow, you Israelites have some weird stuff going on...*

As the Gentiles gained numbers in the Church, however, they sought ways to “package” (if you will) the Gospel to make it more palatable to other Gentiles; this is the chief reason why Jesus’ birth is not celebrated in September – when, according to research\*, it may have *actually* taken place – but on December 25 which, according to various sources, was either a pagan festival “Christianized” to make the transition to the Church easier, the winter solstice of the Fourth Century (when the date was formally set) or a simple realignment in switching from the lunar calendar used in Judaism to the Gregorian calendar used by much of the rest of the world. (In actuality, December 25 is likely closer to the event of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary by the angel Gabriel and the earthly *conception* of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.)

The bottom line here is that Gentile believers felt they needed to keep some of “their ways” as they entered the Kingdom of God in order to make Salvation... comfortable. This was bad enough if the practices retained contradicted the Word of God, but there was also a movement going on to disconnect the Church from Judaism, partly brought about by the resentments mentioned above. A process was taking place to purge from doctrine or liturgy anything that seemed Jewish in its origins. The Council of Nicea and its successors in the Fourth Century, although producing the first uniform Christian doctrine (The Nicene Creed), also prohibited worship on the Jewish Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday) and the observance of Jewish feast days such as Passover, First Fruits and Tabernacles. These prohibitions would later be enforced with the death penalty by Roman Emperor Theodosius I... ironically, for the crime of heresy. And, of course, both church and synagogue leaders told their adherents to stay out of the other’s houses of worship. Although God had opened the way into the Kingdom for the Gentiles, God’s other purpose in this was to draw the Jewish people into a relationship with their Messiah. God’s timing is His own, and we may never fully understand His timetable; but I cannot help wonder if this disconnect with the Jewish roots of the faith may have altered it, if the return of the Lord Yeshua might not have come sooner if Gentiles had been more open to their Jewish brothers.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome (chapter 11), used the analogy of the grapevine to describe the relations between Jews, Gentiles and Jesus. In this analogy, some sections of the vine are the natural, cultivated portions (referring to Israel) and some are wild vines engrafted into the cultivated system (referring to

Gentiles); all sections, however, get their nourishment from the same source, which is Jesus. Carrying the analogy further, if both the cultivated and wild sections receive their nourishment from the same source, then technically there should be no major change to either one. Yet for around 1,500 years, the “wild vine” has dominated the Church to the point where they have told the natural, cultivated parts how they should appear and act. The Gentile-dominated church did not follow the Biblical precepts in dealing with their Jewish brothers; it sought to purge the church of any Jewish influence and tried to *force* acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, telling converts they must abandon their Jewish identity in the process. This was a heavy-handed approach that is un-Biblical and certainly un-Christ-like.

Fortunately, this is changing as both Jew and Gentile begin to realize that God’s purpose for both is not merely unity but the creation of a completely new being in the Body of Christ with the characteristics of both – “one new man,” as many in the Messianic movement refer to this process, referencing Ephesians 2: 14-16. Greater numbers of Jews are accepting Yeshua (Jesus) as the prophesied Messiah, while Gentile believers are starting to reconnect with the once-scorned Jewish roots of the faith. The “head of the body,” who is Yeshua, is being more fully connected to His body on Earth; one might even say that greater enervation is being made to the parts of the Body.

But as these two people who benefit from the same covenant with God begin to heal their relationship, new divisions will come from another area – among the peoples the “one new man” is emerging from. Among Jewish people, there will always be those who not only do not accept Jesus, but react almost violently to the mention of His name. (Sadly understandable, given the lies they have been told about Him and the actions of evil people over the centuries using Him as an excuse to persecute the Jews.) Among Gentile believers, there will be those who will not accept the Jewish roots of the faith and the greater understanding of the Kingdom they provide for several reasons. Some will reject out of a sense of over-emphasized tradition, some a desire to not move away from one’s “comfort zone,” some will be more enamored of the false doctrines embraced by various denominations that permit what the Bible specifically and unequivocally calls sin, while others (on both sides of the debate) will reject out of – let’s be honest – outright bigotry; some open, some buried and denied to the hilt.

God is calling the Church out from the churches in preparation for one last Great Awakening before the “final act” commences on the End Time calendar. There will be one last appeal made for people to accept Jesus/Yeshua before the Body of Christ is caught away for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and those left behind endure the Great Tribulation. But there will also be believers who will follow their Lord as closely as possible and be a part of the last great move, and those who will shrink back, whose reactions will range from suspicion to hostility over what is taking place; throughout history, such divisions always come with each move of God.

When a baby is conceived in our physical bodies, there are two types of tissue created from the same new DNA pattern; the first type forms the framework – the support tissue (like the placenta) or “scaffolding,” if you will – for the baby to be created, while the other type of tissue make up the baby’s physical body. The latter grows, is born and eventually matures into an adult, while the former is discarded after birth. This point of differentiation is the place the Church is at now, and believers have a choice to make; they can move with God, continue to grow in His knowledge and be a part of the move...

or not. I do not think the latter believers will lose their salvation or their place in the Kingdom of Heaven, but they *will* miss out on a great opportunity for rewards for service to the Kingdom and a chance to hear, *Well done, good and faithful servant!* (Matthew 25:23).

The two passages of Scripture leading this message may seem contradictory at first, with Jesus Himself talking about bringing division on the one hand, and Paul talking about unity in the Body of Christ on the other. The key to this seeming paradox lies in how we respond to this move within the Body of Christ before the great move of God as both Jewish and Gentile elements are brought into reconciliation in Him and coordinated for the end times. Will we respond as Orpah who returned to Moab and cling to our traditions, whatever they may be? Or will we respond as Ruth, and embrace all that the Lord offers us?

Permit me to remind you who are believers that did not the things of the Lord seem unfamiliar and strange when you first accepted Jesus as Savior? Now, you would probably say you wouldn't give them up for the world – but would you let them be changed or increased for the sake of the *Kingdom*? God's ways, however unfamiliar they may seem at first, are how the Kingdom of God currently operates in Heaven, will be how the Kingdom will operate on Earth during the Millennial Reign of Jesus upon His return, and will be the method of operation in the New Heaven and the New Earth, where God will dwell with human beings forever. We should be about the task of learning these ways *now*, for this is pleasing to God.

Once again, the people of God are presented with the same choice set before the Israelites as they took possession of the land promised by God to their forefathers:

*Now fear the LORD, and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*

(Joshua 24: 14, 15)

I, for one, long to see what God brings to this nation and this world in this last Great Awakening. I pray God give you wisdom to make wise choices in this New Year.

For the Glory of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ  
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\*: If you wish to see the research, I strongly recommend Rick Larson's excellent presentation on *The Star of Bethlehem* (available on DVD) or his website at [www.bethlehemstar.net](http://www.bethlehemstar.net) .