

July 15-21
New Testament Lesson # 28
The Word of God Grew and Multiplied
(Acts 10-15)
By Lenet Hadley Read

I. From the very beginning the Lord intended His Gospel to go to all mankind--- **in time**. But they were to receive it at *different times* and in *different ways*.

A. Israel's history and its laws show God's covenants were meant for all

1. **Abraham was told to circumcise all within his household**, even though they were not his offspring (Genesis 17:23).
2. God had counseled Israelites not to harvest all of their fields, but **to leave some "for the strangers"** (Leviticus 19:9-10). This witnessed that those outside Israel would receive, eventually, from Christ's spiritual harvest as well.
3. Ruth, the **Moabitess, was a witness those not originally of the House of Israel could receive of its blessings, if they accepted Israel's God and were faithful**.

II. At His coming, Jesus' offered His Gospel first to Israel, as was the plan.

A. He was personally sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

1. Though as the result of great faith, he did bless some Gentiles, showing that in time they would also receive all His blessings.

B. He also sent His apostles primarily to Israelites first (Matthew 10:5-6).

III. But the plan was for His disciples to take His gospel to the Gentiles as well (3 Nephi 15:21- 22).

A. Peter received revelation verifying the Lord was no respecter of persons, and that it was time for the Gentiles to receive the Gospel (Acts 10).

1. President Howard W. Hunter said, "Peter had been of the opinion that only Jews were in the favor of the Lord and that Gentiles were not as acceptable. Before he had ever met Cornelius, though, a vision was shown him, and he saw plainly that God was not partial. No nation or people or individual could expect to be favored above another" (*That We Might Have Joy*, Deseret Book, p. 69.)

B. Paul and Barnabus first testify to Jews, (Acts 13) though telling them they were meant to be a "light to the Gentiles" as well (verse 47).

1. When the Jews, angry that the gospel is preached to the Gentiles, turn against Paul and Barnabus, they take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-47).
2. Paul's Roman citizenship helps in his mission to the Gentiles, allowing him to travel freely throughout the Roman Empire and giving him protection as well.

IV. While most of Israel rejects the Gospel, many Gentiles receive the Gospel with joy.

A. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

B. One early Gentile leader, Clement, left a beautiful record of how the Gospel had blessed their lives.

1. ‘ ... how great a debt of holiness do we own him [Jesus Christ]? For he gave us the light, he called us “son,” as a Father, he saved us when we were perishing....

‘We were maimed in our understanding, worshipping stone, wood, and gold, ... the works of men, and our whole life was nothing else than death. We were covered with darkness, and our eyes were full of mist; but we have received our sight, and by his will we have cast off the cloud which covered us. For he had pity on us, and saved us in his mercy, and regarded the great error and destruction which was in us...; for he called us when we were not, and it was his will that out of nothing we should come to being.’ (From “The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” Kirsopp Lake, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 129-131).

V. Some Jews rejected the Gentiles altogether.

A. The rejection of the Gentiles had been prophesied through the story of Jonah. Jonah was not accepting when Ninevah (Gentiles) repented. As a result, he lost God’s protecting power because of this resistance to God’s love for all. **This same thing now occurred among some Jews.**

1. Jesus had warned that the “Sign of Jonah” would be experienced among the Jews. (See my OT Lesson # 33 on Jonah).

B. Others demanded Gentiles first go through all the rituals to make them “Jews” before being accepted into their synagogues (Acts 15:1-35).

1. They failed to understand that Jesus had now done away with circumcision, **and had substituted higher laws and ordinances [baptism].**

VI. That God is no respecter of Persons has been re-emphasized in these latter days.

A. The Revelation to President Kimball and members of the Twelve Apostles in June 1978, opening the priesthood to all worthy males of any lineage, brought a profound change to missionary work and temple work and a great leap forward.

1. Elder Bruce R. McConkie related this Revelation to Early Christianity.

“The gospel goes to various peoples and nations on a priority basis. We were commanded in the early days of this dispensation to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. Our revelations talk about its going to every creature. There was, of course, no possible way for us to do all of this in the beginning day of our dispensation, nor can we now, in the full sense... Not only is the gospel to go, on a priority basis and ... to a divine timetable, to one nation after another, but the whole history of God’s dealings with men on earth indicates that such has been the case in the past: it has been restricted and limited where many people are concerned... There have been these problems [in the latter days] and the Lord has permitted them to arise. There isn’t any question about that. We do not envision the whole reason and purpose behind all of it... You know the principle: God had made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after

him, and find him: (Acts 17:26-27) --- meaning that there is an appointed time for successive nations and peoples and races and cultures to be offered the saving truths of the gospel.” Bruce R. McConkie, “The New Revelation on Priesthood,” *Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981) pp. 129-31.

B. Some General Authorities and others have seen Jesus’ Parable of the Laborers (Matthew 20:1-16), as very pertinent to the way the Lord has bestowed His gospel blessings on different peoples at different times. They see those called after the June 1978 Revelation among the Last or Eleventh Hour Laborers. **And the point is that those who come into the Kingdom and labor faithfully at the Eleventh Hour receive just as great a reward as those who began to labor earlier.**

1. Elder McConkie explained, “We talk about the scriptures being unfolded --- read again the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and remind yourselves that those who labor through the heat of the day for twelve hours are going to be rewarded the same as those who came in at the third and sixth and the eleventh hours. Well, it’s the eleventh hour; it’s the Saturday night of time. In this eleventh hour the Lord has given the blessings of the gospel to the last group of laborers in the vineyard. (“All Are Alike Unto God” (Address to Second Annual Church Educational System Religious Education Symposium, August, 17-19, 1978, p. 5).

C. A great challenge for Latter-day Saints, as for the early Saints, is to be truly accepting of all those now coming into the faith, truly from all nations of the earth. **We must not be like Jonah, nor as the early Judaizers in Christianity, who failed to rejoice and fully accept others because of language or other cultural differences.**

D. President Howard W. Hunter stated, “[It] should be manifestly evident to members of the Church that our Father loves all his children. He desires all of them to embrace the gospel and come unto him. Only those who obey him and keep his commandments are favored. As members of the Lord’s church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover the supreme truth that indeed our Father is no respecter of persons. Sometimes we unduly offend brothers and sisters of other nations by assigning exclusiveness to one nationality of people over another.... As our Father loves all his children, we must love all people --- of every race, culture, and nationality --- and teach them the principles of the gospel so that they might embrace it and come to a knowledge of the divinity of the Savior.” (*That They Might Have Joy*, pp. 73-74, 75).

VII. While the apostles would in time suffer martyrdom for their great work in behalf of both Jew and Gentile, the Lord preserved them, over and over again, until the work of each was finished.

A. Peter was miraculously freed from prison, while Herod, his persecutor, died of disease (Acts 12)

B. Paul suffered stoning, yet his life was preserved (Acts 14, see vs. 5, 19-20).

C. If we accept those of all nations and labor with them together in Oneness, there will be greater protection for all **we Last Laborers who serve in this, the Eleventh Hour.**