

July 22-28
New Testament Lesson # 29
“The Lord Had Called Us for to Preach the Gospel”
Acts 16-21
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- I. The Lord prepared far in advance for the spread of His Gospel in the Meridian of Time.
- A. The Lord prepared Paul as a *chosen vessel* to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 - 1. Latter-day Saints understand he was foreordained for his great mission.
 - 2. Paul’s past prepared him to willingly suffer for the Gospel (Acts 9:15-16).
 - 3. Paul’s Roman citizenship allowed him to travel everywhere and to give him some protection (Acts 16:38-39).
 - 4. As Roman citizen, Paul was entitled to “an impartial trial; to an appeal to the emperor; to freedom from degrading punishments, including bonds, scourging, and crucifixion” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*). He was obviously not always granted these at first, however.
 - B. Athens’ altar “To the Unknown God” seems to have been prepared to give Paul an opening to preach the true God, unknown to those in Athens (As shown in Acts 17:16-34).

II. While Paul’s services were immense, **it is important to know Paul was not the only apostle actively spreading the Gospel.**

- A. “Peter, James, and John acted as the First Presidency of the Church in their day.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:152). They were called by God to serve in this capacity and Paul served under their direction.
- B. Paul indicates that at first the other apostles spent most of their time teaching the Jews, while Paul was sent mostly to the Gentiles (See Galatians 2:9).
- C. But we should know that other writings and traditions indicate it was not always as simple as this. For example, there are traditions that Thomas took the Gospel to India. And Scotland has a tradition that Andrew brought the Gospel to them.
- D. While fourteen of twenty-seven books contained in the New Testament were Paul’s epistles, “... **it may well be found, when God reveals [all things] ...that Peter and others of the early brethren traveled as widely and wrote as much as did Paul.**” (*The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles*, Institute Manual, p. 269).

III. We should understand we do not have the full Biblical record.

- A. The early and persistent destruction of records is likely one cause of the lack of the history of the other apostles.
 - 1. The Romans tried to destroy Christianity by destroying their records. Just as Christians from the outset had recognized that the scriptures were germane to the spiritual well-being of the Church, so also did their enemies. As opponents saw the spread of this new religion, they realized that its books were a key to its destruction. Therefore, as they persecuted and slew the leaders, they also sought to destroy their scriptures.

Thus, intermittent waves of persecution, with their accompanying destruction of

books, continued through the third century after Christ. Many scriptures were sought for destruction, particularly the community caches kept in the churches.

- B. Later, after Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire, treasure-troves of records were burned by marauding barbarians (such as Vandals and Goths) and later also by northern sea marauders (such as the Vikings).
- E. “The Dark Ages,” or the first five centuries following Christ, got that name from the lack of historical records remaining due to these many destructions of books.

IV. But gradually a fuller picture is being assembled.

- A. For example, there is *much evidence* that there were many in the British Isles, of Israelite stock, who were prepared to receive the Gospel shortly after Christ’s death, beginning around 37 A.D.

- B. In fact, according to many reputable sources, the Gospel was taken to the British Isles by Christ’s apostles and seventies themselves.

While some may be hesitant to accept this evidence, we must remember that Jesus had commanded the apostles to “take the gospel to all nations.” This was so important that Jesus Himself brought it to the Americas. So we should have faith that it was indeed taken to far more lands than we have the records for in the New Testament.

V. There is also evidence in what the prophet Joseph Smith taught. Due to the abundance of Israelite blood in the British Isles, the preaching of the Gospel went there early and was very successful in this last dispensation.

- A. Apostle Heber C. Kimball was told by Joseph Smith after the great successes in England not to be surprised, for ancient apostles had blessed that land.

- B. Dan Jones, who was Welsh himself, was sent to Wales on several missions. Joseph Smith’s last prophecy, made to Jones in Carthage Jail where Jones had chosen to join him, was “You will yet see Wales and fulfill the mission appointed you before you die.” (DHC, 6:601). Later Wilford Woodruff, as President of the British Mission, sent Jones to oversee all missionary work in Wales. In a short time he had established 29 branches there. By February, 1847, there were over 2,000 converts in Wales. When Jones left, (1849), there were 72 branches and 4,645 members. By the time of Jones’ death, “he had helped bring some 5,000 Welsh colonists to the Great Basin.” (Rex L. Christensen, “I Have a Question”, *The Ensign*, March, 1982, p. 19). Jones has been given credit for being one of the church’s most successful missionaries. But the fuller truth is *he was prepared to go to a people who themselves had been prepared to receive it*. For much evidence has been accumulated that these people were largely of Israelite stock. However, in time, they had lost knowledge of those teachings once coming from the ancient apostles. History also shows what forces had caused this to happen.

VI. Again, it is due to the loss of records and even the rewriting of history by Britain’s conquerors that the fuller story of the Gospel being successfully preached in the British Isles and other lands, shortly after Christ’s death, is not well known.

- A. In fact, according to some histories, those converts in the British Isles were among the most faithful in subsequently assisting in taking the Gospel to other nations.

VII. The Lord often prepares not only those who preach the gospel, but those who are to receive it.

A. Note that the guidance of the Spirit and the vision Paul received shows a people in Macedonia had been prepared, as opposed to Asia (Acts 16:6-10).

B. Note that Lydia heard and received the word because the Lord had helped open her heart (Acts 16:14-15).

C. Note how Paul speaks of the Saints in Thessalonica as being of the “elect” of God. (1 Thessalonians 1:4).

1. Many people misunderstand this term. (See “Election” in the Bible Dictionary).

2. It is possible for those “elect” to fail to live up to their opportunities.

VIII. The Lord also prepares the way for those who accept His Gospel to be strengthened.

A. Paul repeatedly visited, or sent others to visit, areas where churches had been established. He also wrote letters to strengthen them.

B. In strengthening the saints in Thessalonica, he counsels them “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (v. 7).

C. Paul also warned the early Saints about the impending apostasy (2 Thessalonians Chapter 2). This warning would have strengthened and helped protect them.

D. Paul further taught of the Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:13-18). While it obviously did not occur in their lifetimes, they were still blessed to receive such teachings.

1. It gave them hope, if they remained righteous, they would rise with the just.

E. The Lord was also working through Paul’s writings *to speak to us* today, to help us prepare for the Second Coming.

1. One of his key teachings was: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

IX. The Lord confirmed this promise through revelation to Joseph Smith, as recorded in D&C 88:96-7, and gives additional detail in verse 98.

The Lord continually prepares to bless His children, far in advance of the needful time.