

Things of the Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ - 2

Preaching to Jews and Gentiles

The things of the kingdom and Jesus the Christ are preached throughout Acts: from the third verse to the last verse of the book. This series of articles on Acts explores these 'things'.

The Acts of the Apostles is the inspired record of the words and activities of the apostles soon after the ascension of Jesus Christ. These men were eyewitnesses of many of the things they believed. They had the power of the Holy Spirit, which is God's power, and were fearless in their preaching about Jesus.

To the Jews

Nonetheless, the Jewish authorities persecuted them and tried their utmost to stop them telling people about the resurrection of Jesus. This was despite all the evidence of their miracles, their personal witness and the teaching in their Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus was a Jew, and the Law of Moses and Old Testament prophecies had been given to the Jewish nation. The Old Testament had revealed to them the character of Almighty God, and His plan and purpose for the world. Jews were, in fact, 'His people' provided that they obeyed His commands. Unfortunately, throughout their history the religious leaders had often failed to believe and obey, and this culminated in their rejection of Jesus as their promised Christ (Messiah). By doing this they also rejected God's

offer of salvation, as this was only possible through Jesus. He said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

To Everyone

In Acts chapter 10 we have the account of how God persuaded the apostle Peter that both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) were to be called to be part of His family.

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

The first Gentile to be baptised was the centurion Cornelius. Thereafter the apostles witnessed to both Jews and Gentiles alike, because there was no discrimination in the terms of this offer of eternal life:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28).

This concept was revolutionary to the Jews but had been promised years before by their prophets. For example, God had said of Jesus:

It is too small a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

To Us Today

Today we all have access to the gospel message, in our Bibles. This is an awesome privilege, and given the sad history of the Jews we need to make sure that we have a true understanding of what God asks of us. This means keeping to the message preached by the first century apostles, and ignoring those who water down the clear message of the Bible or add things that are not in. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8–9).

In the letter to the Romans he makes it abundantly clear that we Gentiles have no room for complacency. If we do not believe and obey, we shall be 'cut off' (see Romans 11:18–22).

The Apostles' Message

The table opposite shows themes about the gospel that occur regularly in Acts, focussing on the period from Cornelius in chapter 10, and predominantly the record of the apostle Paul's missionary journeys through the Mediterranean area following his dramatic conversion (in Acts chapter 9).

The apostles usually went first to the Synagogue to preach to Jews, using their Old Testament scriptures to show them that Jesus was their Messiah.

Their initial preaching to Gentiles was, understandably, slightly different. This audience was less familiar with the Jewish scriptures and beliefs, and so the message was often tailored to the situation of the audience, but **Jesus was always the focus of their message.**

We can see that there is a very consistent message being preached: repentance, baptism, the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus the Christ, the only saviour, and the promise of his return and the kingdom of God after a time of judgement.

This gospel message is centred on Israel and founded on the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. This essential link with the Jewish scriptures was a key primary message to the Jews, but also essential for the Gentile converts. Paul's letters to churches containing both Jewish and Gentile members (e.g. Corinthians, Romans and Galatians) make continual reference to the Old Testament in explanations of key Christian teaching and conduct. We therefore need to study **the whole Bible** to understand what God wants of us.

There are many different christian groups with very different beliefs. Every Bible reader needs to ask himself or herself whether their beliefs are the same as those of the apostles, who preached with the authority of the Holy Spirit. If so, the question is whether we are truly committed to them.

Anna Hart

Theme in Preaching	References in Acts 10-28 <i>(while witnessing to Jews AND Gentiles)</i>	Number of references in Acts 1-9 <i>(witnessing to Jews)</i>
Jesus was approved by God	10:38; 22:14	4
Jesus was crucified	10:39; 13:27-29; 26:23	6
God raised Jesus from the dead	10:40-41; 13:30,33-37; 17:3,31; 25:19; 26:23	8
Belief in resurrection	17:18; 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:8	1
Jesus was exalted / is in heaven	10:36	10
Jesus is the Christ	17:3; 18:5,28; 19:4	4
Apostles were witnesses	10:39,41; 13:31; 22:14-15; 23:11; 26:16,22	6
Apostles had Holy Spirit power and authority (#)	10:19,44; 11:12,15-16,24,28; 13:2-4,9,52; 14:3; 15:8,28; 16:6-7; 18:5; 19:6; 20:23; 21:4,11	10
Gentiles also to be offered salvation	10:35; 11:18; 13:46-48; 15:7,15-17; 26:23	2
These events were prophesied in the Old Testament	10:43; 13:23,29,32-35; 15:15-16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 24:14; 26:6,22; 28:23,25-27	9
The importance of the name of Jesus	10:48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5,13,17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9	10
Salvation is through Jesus	10:36,43; 13:23-26,38-39; 15:11; 16:31; 22:16; 26:15-18	4
Jesus will come back / judge the world	10:42; 17:31; 24:25	2
Kingdom of God	14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31	2
The need for repentance	11:18; 13:24; 14:15; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20	4
Baptism	10:37,47-48; 11:16; 13:24; 16:15,33; 18:8,25; 19:3-5; 22:16	5
The importance of the Jewish fathers	13:17,32; 22:14; 24:14; 26:6; 28:17	4
God is the creator	14:15; 17:24	1

This was a very special privilege of the early apostles to enable them to establish the first century Christian churches.