

LESSON 12 – THE GREAT REVERSAL BEGINS!

Last week we talked about Jesus' trial and His admission that He was, "the son of man" mentioned in Daniel 7. This pushed Caiphas and the others over the edge and sealed Jesus' fate, eventually resulting in His crucifixion. But that eventually resulted in His resurrection where He ascended to the throne, just as Daniel had seen in his vision. Though the powers of evil rejoiced at first, it was soon apparent that they had sealed their own fate when Jesus rose from the dead. All they could do at that point, was attempt to prolong the inevitable. And I believe they still feel that they can win somehow. Remember, though they are immortal and powerful, they are not omniscient. Ironically, they are still "praying for a hail Mary."

Jesus was tried and crucified around Passover. Fifty days later, was the feast of Pentecost – so named because it took place 50 days after the Passover. It was a festive occasion with Jews from all over the known world, (Roman Empire and surrounding regions) staying in Jerusalem from Passover until after Pentecost. Scholars tell us that as many as 2 million people would have

swelled Jerusalem's borders during this time. After the crucifixion and Jesus' resurrection, 3 days later, Jesus met with the apostles for 40 days, explaining to them what was happening and how their mission would move forward from there. But they were still focused on the kingdom being restored immediately. They still didn't fathom the long-range plan.

Acts 1: 3-10

³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, **“you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into

heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

They were all to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Why did the Spirit have to come? Prior to this, the presence of the Spirit resided in the Holy of Holies. As we learn later from Paul, we are all now temples of God and the Holy Spirit resides within each believer. He would no longer be represented in just one place. Wherever a believer was/ is, He would now be. Because the temple had been rendered obsolete, and would be destroyed some 40 years later, as Jesus foretold, the Holy Spirit would now be more “portable,” as it were.

We also see in verse 6, that the focus of the apostles was still on the restoration of the kingdom – essentially immediately. They were still focusing on Jesus in the role of the Davidic Messiah. In truth, that is the last of the three tracks of the OT Messiah in which He will manifest. That is at His second coming. At the time of Acts 2, He is in “the son of man” mode, having already been in “the suffering servant” mode. Jesus told them that it wasn’t for them to know the times or seasons which were fixed by the Father. I believe it would be good for us to latch onto that same truth.

What they failed to realize, was that they were on the cusp of the beginning of the end. We need to realize that God doesn’t get in a hurry. All this happened 2,000 years ago, and it had been at least twice that long since things had started in Eden.

As Jesus ascended from them, in a cloud, no less (cloud rider), they were sad – apparently still not grasping all their mission entailed.

They were to begin in Jerusalem, sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom, and then work their way out in concentric circles from there.

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

They were to wait for power – and power they would need. But there was also another “practical” thing they would need. In order to share the message outside the confines of their world – in order to infiltrate all the nations, they would have to be able to communicate. They needed to be able to speak the languages of the people to whom they were to go.

Most people in the roman Empire spoke Greek. It was the “lingua franca” of the empire. Many were bi-lingual, at least to some degree. Most of the Jews spoke Aramaic and some Greek, largely depending on their economic status. Romans spoke Greek and some Latin, depending on their status. And other languages were spoken here and there, with Greek being the main one. Most literate people read Greek. Few Jews read Hebrew at this time. The OT was most commonly read in the Greek translation, known as the Septuagint. The point being, that as you got further and further away from Jerusalem, there would be more barriers to communicating the Gospel.

How did all these languages come to be? Genesis 10 and the dispersion at Babel is the answer. It is also the answer to why Pentecost had to happen the way it did.

Remember, the over-arching purpose to the Bible is to show us how God will one day have the world He wanted in the beginning. He will have a global Eden – a global temple, where everyone is a believer- His family on earth, as it is in Heaven. The Bible is the larger story as to how all this happened and didn't happen throughout human history.

Once some of His council members went rogue, in Genesis 6, which led to the events of the flood and eventually Babel, where mankind once again decided to do their own thing, God gave the people what they wanted. They didn't want him, so He disinherited them and gave them over to gods they desired to worship (**Dt. 4:19-20; 32:8-9; Ps. 82**). At that point, mankind scattered over the face of the earth, which was what they were told to do in the beginning as well as after the flood but had refused to do at Babel. When they couldn't communicate, they had no choice but to spread out within their clans and extended families. Ever since then, there have been many languages among many different people groups. And that is where Pentecost comes into the plan.

Acts 2: 1-13

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And ^{at} this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And ^{they} were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking ^{Galileans?} ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and ^{Medes} and ^{Elamites} and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and ^{proselytes}, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And ^{all} were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others ^{mocking} said, “They are filled with new wine.”

As usual, there are some links to the OT that aren't that obvious to us in English. But to the Jewish observer, there were some hyperlinks that spoke volumes. In the OT, a rushing mighty wind was a familiar description of the presence of God (2 Kings 2:1,11; Job 38:1; 40:6). Here, in the book of Acts, it is associated with the coming of the Spirit (3rd member of the Trinity). Fire is also familiar with descriptions of God in the OT (Ezek. 1:4; Isa. 6:4,6; Dan. 7:9; Ex. 3:2; 19:18; 20: 18).

So, when we read of a rushing, mighty wind and flaming tongues of fire, we understand that God was in this and these images would have insured this meaning to everyone. But what happened next was strange to everyone.

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The apostles began speaking in foreign tongues! In this case, these weren't any “heavenly” languages, but they were speaking in the languages familiar to Jews who had come for the feasts from all over the known world. How do we know? We know because there is a list given of where all the people lived. This is connected with the incident at Babel.

How do we know this? First of all – the fact that many languages exist, goes back to Babel. That is elementary. But also, in the Greek, the language which Luke, the author of Acts could read and write, was also the language of the majority of OT readers of the day. And in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) there are some other

connections. “Divided”, as in the cloven or divided tongues is the first key. And the word, “confused” is the second. In English, that may not seem like much, Luke is writing in Greek and the words he used come from Genesis 11: 7 and Deuteronomy 32:8, both of which speak of the division of the languages at Babel and the confusion that resulting from God mixing up the languages. But why make this connection?

The Sprit of God came as a mighty wind and fire. The confusion of having multiple languages, which was a result of Babel, was removed when the flaming tongues enabled the disciples to speak in the languages of the diverse groups of Jews who had come from all over the region. Three thousand of them heard and believed! A couple of things were accomplished here. First of all, a barrier to the spread of the Gospel was removed, undoing something God had done long ago. The apostles needed this to happen, obviously. But what happened to this group of 3K who heard and believed? What was to become of them? Well, eventually, they went back home and told people of their new faith. They went back to their corners of the world. Beachheads were established for the church and the furthering of the Gospel. But what else is going on here?

We have a list of the placed from which all these people came. If you look at the list, you see that it starts in the East, where the Jews had been exiled at the ends of the OT. It was also where Babel was. The list then moves westward to the farthest point of the known world at the time. That is Spain, or Tarshish as it was called then. When you look at these places, you can overlay them with the table of nations in Genesis and you see that they cover the same places and peoples. What does this mean? It means that the Great Reversal had begun.

The nations that had been scattered and divided by languages and tribal groups were now going to be reached with the Gospel! Eventually the Apostle Paul took the northern and western arm of this “map” as his marching orders and began to set up churches, in some cases, as he ran into people that had been there in Jerusalem at Pentecost! Paul’s missionary journeys took him farther and farther westward, until we read in Romans that he was led to continue to Spain. Paul felt he was led to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles of the dispersion at Babel. To his mind, once he had reached Spain, he had reached the end of the world with the Gospel and Jesus would then return. This is what the majority of the book of Acts is about.

From all this, we see that Paul understood the cosmic geography of the OT. Paul continually spoke of the evil powers that conspired against him as we strove to spread the Word. His vocabulary shows us this.

- Rulers/ principalities (Eph. 1:20 – 21; 6:12; Col. 2:15)
- Authorities (Eph. 1:20-21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 2:15; 1 Cor. 2:6)
- Powers (Eph. 1:20-21; 3:10)
- Dominions (Col. 1:16)
- lords (Eph. 1:20-21; 1 Cor. 8:5)
- thrones (Col. 1:16)

All of these terms denote geographical rulership. Paul’s language is that of domain authority. It reflects how the OT depicts the spiritual world’s relationship to our world. Paul knew that the nations set aside by God are were under the dominion of spiritual beings hostile to Him and His people.

WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

Paul had a supernatural perspective on not only his own life, but about the world in which he lived. No, he didn't see demons under every rock or circumstance, but he was aware of the war that has been raging since almost the beginning and how he fit into history as well as God's plan. He viewed himself as an instrument of God. And that he was. But so were all those who heard and believed that day at Pentecost! And after Pentecost, they went before him to infiltrate the demonic strongholds where they lived.

And if Paul was an instrument of God, then so are we! But if that is the case, then why was he so much more effective?

One difference is that Paul understood what his life was really about. He knew and embraced his purpose. And he actually believed that evil powers had dominion over the earth – and that those powers were real! But he also believed that the power behind him was even greater! Do we believe these things! It is often hard for the 21st century mind to wrap itself around these things. We tend to go to one extreme or the other. But the Bible puts them forth as givens and that's how Paul treated these things in his own life.

Paul didn't know anything about the far expanses of Europe, Africa or Asia. He didn't know anything about the Western Hemisphere – but God did. And while Paul thought he could actually complete the whole task essentially by himself and in his day, he was obviously wrong. But God knew it would take many more people and a lot more time.

But look at the heart of Paul! Look what God began with just 12 men to begin with. Paul saw his task as reaching the nations with the Gospel. And if we're not actively trying to complete the task, then we aren't doing what we were created to do. In my experience, people who are depressed and dissatisfied with their lives are people without a purpose or people running from their purpose. Is it any wonder that so many people are depressed in the Western nations nowadays?

Some of the questions we need to ask ourselves are:

- **What would our lives be like if we woke up every morning with a view of the world and its supernatural influences that matched that of Paul's?**
- **What if, each day, our lives were organized around our knowledge of our status as part of God's family, tasked with delivering the message and ministering to those who are still in darkness?**
- **What if we lived intentionally, knowing that each decision we make and each word we speak wasn't randomly purposeless?**
- **Our jobs, our income and our talents, even our problems are of no consequence when it comes to knowing who we really are and who we will be and why we are here!**

We cannot see the supernatural world, just as we can't see the microscopic world, but we are involved in both!

These are the beliefs and attitudes that drove the early church to spread, even under the threat and reality of harsh persecution. In those conditions, the church thrives! It grows! And it fulfills its mission! The early church believed the spiritual conflict was real and

that ultimately, they couldn't lose! And they didn't lose! We are the living proof of that! As Paul said:

Eph. 6:12 For we do not **wrestle** against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We have the same enemies as Paul, but we also have the same mission, the same empowerment and the same Lord and king! You are here in this day and time for a reason and a purpose. And you have heard that reason, that purpose today.

Acts 1:7-8

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We've got the plan and the playbook. Now it's time to break the huddle and hit the field! God bless!