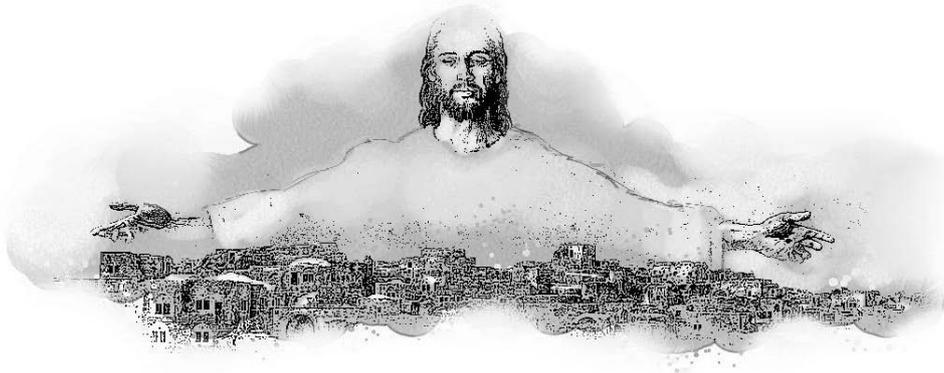


Lord of Jews and Gentiles (Non-Jews)



SABBATH—MAY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 14:1–21; Matthew 14:22–33; Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 29:13.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I, the LORD, have chosen you to do what is right. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you safe. You will put my covenant [agreement] with the people of Israel into effect. And you will be a light for the other nations’ ” (Isaiah 42:6, NIV).

IN MATTHEW 15:24, JESUS SAYS clearly, “ ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ ” (NKJV). Yes, Christ became human and worked among the people in Israel.

But as the whole Bible shows, Israel was not the only people God cared about. The reason God chose Israel was that He could bless all people on earth through them. “God created the heavens and spread them out. The LORD made the earth and everything that grows on it. He gives breath to its people. He gives life to those who walk on it. He says to his servant, ‘I, the LORD, have chosen you to do what is right. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you safe. You will put my covenant with the people of Israel into effect. And you will be a light for the other nations. You will open eyes that can’t [cannot] see. You will set prisoners free. Those who sit in darkness will come out of their cells’ ” (Isaiah 42:5–7, NIV).

It was through Israel, and through its Messiah (the Chosen One; Christ), that God would reach out to the whole world. This week we will learn a little more about the Lord’s outreach to all people in need of salvation.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY (Matthew 14:1–21)

One of the most well-known acts of Jesus is the feeding of the five thousand, along with women and children (Matthew 14:21). But as is true with the rest of the New Testament, this story is not without a message. Its message helps us understand, even more deeply, the meaning of what Jesus has done.

Read Matthew 14:1–21. What happens right before the miracle of feeding 5,000 people? What part does that event play in what follows?

Put yourself in the position of the disciples at that time. John the Baptist, clearly a man of God, had just lost his head. The disciples were the ones who tell Jesus about it. The verses do not say it, but the disciples must have felt very discouraged. No doubt it put their faith to the test. But what Jesus did next must have strengthened their faith.

But there is a much deeper meaning to this story. It is true that the miracle was meant to increase the disciples' faith. But Jesus' action of feeding the Jewish people also was meant to remind everyone of the manna (food from heaven) that God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness. "The tradition arose within Israel that the Messiah would come on a Passover.¹ They also believed that along with His coming, manna would begin to fall again. . . . So, when Jesus fed the five thousand just before Passover, the people of Israel began to wonder whether Jesus was the Messiah and whether He was about to do an even greater miracle. They wondered if Jesus would feed everyone all the time by restoring the manna."—Adapted from Jon Paulien, *John: The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), pages 139, 140.

This was exactly the kind of Messiah the people wanted. They wanted a Messiah that would take care of their physical needs. At this moment, the crowds are ready to make Jesus king. But Jesus had not come to be king, and His refusal would greatly disappoint them. They had their expectations, and when those were not met, many would turn away from Jesus. They did not understand that He had come to do so much more than their narrow and worldly expectations led them to hope for.

In what ways might your expectations of what you hope for from God be too narrow?



Jesus' action of feeding the five thousand was meant to remind everyone of the manna that God gave to Israel in the wilderness.

DEFINITIONS

1. Passover—a Jewish festival that begins in March or April and lasts for seven or eight days. Passover begins with a special meal that reminds Jewish people of how God helped their ancestors escape from Egypt.

LORD OF ALL CREATION (Matthew 14:22–33)



“ ‘Lord, save me!’ ” Peter’s cry shows us how helpless we really are.

DEFINITIONS

2. deism—the belief that there is a God who made the world but that God does not influence (affect) human lives.

After the miraculous feeding, Jesus ordered His disciples into their boat (Matthew 14:22). He wanted to remove them from the confusion and pressure of the crowds. A good teacher will protect his students from what they are not yet ready to handle. Ellen G. White writes, “Jesus orders His disciples to take the boat and return at once to Capernaum. He stays behind to tell the people to go home. . . . His disciples object to [are against] having to leave Him. But Jesus now speaks with an authority He has never used before. They know that it would be useless to object any further. So, in silence they turn toward the sea.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 378.

Read Matthew 14:23–33. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus is and the nature of salvation?

A surprising moment happens when the scared disciples wonder who is walking on the water toward them. Jesus says to them, “ ‘It is I; do not be afraid’ ” (Matthew 14:27, NKJV). The phrase “ ‘It is I’ ” is another way of translating the Greek words *ego eimi*, which mean “I am.” This is the name of God Himself. (Read also Exodus 3:14.)

The Bible often shows the Lord in control of all nature. For example, Psalm 104 clearly shows that God is both the Creator and the Giver of life. Through His power the world continues to live and the laws of nature operate. There is nothing here that hints at the god of deism,² who creates the world and then leaves it alone. Jew or Gentile (non-Jew), we all owe our lives to the power of the same Lord who calmed the sea. (Read also Hebrews 1:3.)

Peter’s cry, “ ‘Lord, save me!’ ” (Matthew 14:30, NKJV) should be our own cry. For if the Lord Jesus does not save us, who will? Peter’s helplessness in that situation shows us our own helplessness.

Think about just how helpless you really are—at the mercy of forces you cannot control. How should this idea help strengthen your dependence upon Jesus?

THE HYPOCRITE'S³ HEART (Matthew 15:1–20)

“The Lord says, ‘These people worship me only with their words. They honor me by what they say. But their hearts are far away from me. Their worship doesn’t [does not] mean anything to me. They teach nothing but human rules’ ” (Isaiah 29:13, NlrV). This is the Lord speaking to Israel in Old Testament times. But what message is here for the church today? What are the two main issues that the Lord warns Israel about? How can we be sure that we do not do the same thing?

Many hundreds of years after Isaiah wrote those words, Jesus quotes them while in a debate with the religious leaders.

Read Matthew 15:1–20. What is the important issue here? How does Jesus deal with it?

At some point after Jesus returns to Capernaum, He gets into a debate with the Jewish teachers about what makes a person unclean (sinful). The teachers had added to the law all kinds of rules about keeping the body clean. For example, you had to wash your hands in a certain way. But Jesus’ disciples were not following this rule. When the scribes⁴ and Pharisees⁵ from Jerusalem pointed it out, Jesus answered as He did.

In short, Jesus strongly criticizes what is so easily a trap for anyone: hypocrisy.⁶ Who has not at some point been guilty of this? We criticize someone for an action while we have done or are doing the same thing or worse. We all like to see the faults of others while being blind to our own. So, being a hypocrite comes naturally to us all.

We all hate hypocrisy in others. It is always so easy to see hypocrisy in others, too. Sometimes we see hypocrisy in others because we do the same thing ourselves. How can we make sure that we are not guilty of pointing fingers while we do the same wrong things?

DEFINITIONS

3. hypocrite—a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs.

4. scribes—teachers of Jewish law and tradition who copied and interpreted the Bible.

5. Pharisees—a group of Jews during New Testament times who believed in strictly obeying the laws of Judaism.

6. hypocrisy—the behavior of people who do things they tell other people not to do; behavior that does not agree with what someone claims to believe or feel.

CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE (Matthew 15:21–28)

After feeding, healing, and preaching to His own people, Jesus makes a surprising decision. He leaves the area of the Jews and enters the area of the outsiders, the Gentiles.

Read Matthew 15:21–28. How are we to understand this story?



“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs’ ” (Matthew 15:26, NlrV).

In many ways, this story is not easy to read. This is because we cannot “hear” the voices and “see” the faces of the people in the Bible stories. At first Jesus seems to ignore this woman. But when He does talk to her, His words seem very rough: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs’ ” (Matthew 15:26, NlrV).

It is true that at this time the Jews thought of Gentiles as dogs. This makes us think of dirty dogs running the streets. But Jesus uses the more affectionate (loving) Greek word, meaning “small dog” (or “puppy dog”) here. This helps us to think of tame dogs kept in the home and fed from the table.

This Canaanite woman calls Jesus the “Son of David.” Her use of this name shows that she knows that Jesus is a Jew. Like a good teacher, Jesus talks with her, and perhaps tests her. Craig Keener writes: “Perhaps Jesus is helping her understand His true mission. She probably would have thought of Jesus as one of the many wandering magicians on whom Gentiles sometimes depended for casting out demons. But Jesus is surely getting her to recognize how important God’s plan of salvation is. This recognition will help the woman admit her deep need of God.—Adapted from *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, page 417.

“Finally, it is possible that this woman was an upper-class Greek woman who was part of a class that had often taken the bread belonging to the poor Jews living in the area of Tyre. . . . Now . . . Jesus switches the way she thinks about who holds the power between Jews and Gentiles on spiritual matters. For example, the ‘bread’ Jesus offers belongs to Israel first. . . . This ‘Greek’ must beg help from a traveling Jew.”

These are not easy verses to understand. But we have to trust Jesus. By talking with this woman, Jesus makes her honorable—just as He did the woman at the well. The Canaanite woman leaves with the promise of her daughter’s healing and her faith in the Son of David stronger.

LORD OF THE GENTILES (Matthew 15:29–39)

Read Matthew 15:29–39 and compare⁷ it with Matthew 14:13–21. How are the two stories the same? And in what ways are they different?

Many people do not realize that Jesus fed crowds of people, not once but twice in the Gospels: the first feeding was for the Jews and the second for the Gentiles. In both examples, Jesus has “mercy” for the people.

How wonderful! Picture in your mind thousands of Gentiles coming out to be taught, loved, and fed by this young Rabbi. Today, most of the people reading the Bible all over the world are not Jews. So, we can easily miss just how unbelievable and surprising something like this must have appeared to the people, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. No question, Jesus was surely taking everyone out of their comfort zones.

But this goal was always part of God’s large plan to pull all peoples of the earth to Him. A shocking verse in the Hebrew Bible supports this truth: “ ‘You Israelites are just like the people of Cush to me,’ announces the LORD. ‘I brought Israel up from Egypt. I also brought the Philistines from Crete and the Arameans from Kir’ ” (Amos 9:7, NIV).

What is God saying here? That He is interested not only in the affairs of Israel but of all people? He is interested in Philistines? Yes, and again, Yes. A careful reading of the Old Testament shows this truth again and again. But this truth had become so lost and forgotten after hundreds of years that by the time the New Testament church was formed, many of the early believers had to learn this basic Bible truth.

Read Romans 4:1–12. In what ways is the gospel, and the worldwide reach of the gospel, taught in these verses?



God’s plan always has been to pull all people of the earth to Him.

DEFINITIONS

7. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: A Christian was speaking to students at a non-Christian university about God. After using all the common arguments, he used a different approach or method. He said, “You know, when I was about the age of most of you, I did not believe in God. Often something would make me believe that maybe God did exist [live]. I always pushed this idea out of my mind. Why? Because something told me that if, really, God did exist, then I was in deep trouble because of how I was living my life.” The mood changed quickly. The Christian clearly struck a nerve. These students, not Christians, probably were not too worried about the Ten Commandments but still sensed that all was not right with their lives. They also thought that if there were a God they would have a lot to answer for. But, as Christians, we do not have to feel uncomfortable when faced with how real God is. Whether Jew or Gentile, when faced with our sinfulness, we can take safety in Christ’s righteousness (holy life) offered to us by faith “because they have faith, and not because they obey the Law” (Romans 3:28, CEV). When we become very aware of our sin, we can claim the promise that “those who belong to Christ Jesus are no longer under God’s sentence. I am [we are] now controlled by the law of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 8:1, 2, NIV). Jew, Gentile—it does not matter. “No matter our age, place in society, race, where you were born, or special religious advantage or benefits we may have, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 403.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Read Matthew 16:1–12. What do you think Jesus means when He says, “ ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’ ”⁸ (Matthew 16:6, NIV)? At first the disciples thought Jesus meant real yeast. During Passover, the Jews were careful to get rid of leaven (yeast); so, they thought Jesus was telling them not to buy bread with leaven. But Jesus had in mind something much deeper. What was it?

② The love of Christ for all people should be the message that spreads first and foremost from Christianity. After all, we are struggling sinners, too. None of us has any hope outside of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the message we send can, at times, seem to be one of judgment, or a “better-than-you” attitude (thought or feeling). Following the lead of Jesus, how can we as a church better show our love and mercy for all people?

DEFINITIONS

8. Sadducees—members of a Jewish religious group in Jesus’ time. They were mostly priests and wealthy men of high or noble birth. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe in an afterlife and the coming of the Messiah.