

JESUS MINISTERS TO GENTILES

Matthew 15:29-38; Mark 7:31-8:9
Yeshua §81

One of the few times I experienced antagonism because of my race was in Hawaii. Cathy and I stopped for a bite at a McDonalds. Sitting a few booths away in my line of sight were two big Hawaiian locals. As I ate, they made it clear through facial expressions and body language, they didn't like us *haoles*. I knew that if I stared back at them in defiance, they would follow us out. Fortunately, they didn't follow us out. It was an awful feeling at several levels. I hated it.

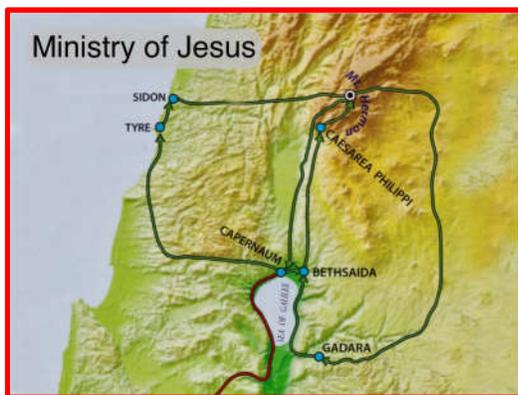
People around the world experience racial prejudice and rejection as a regular part of their lives. It is so destructive. Millions of lives have been destroyed by the racial prejudice that plagues the human condition. Even now, it is a divisive issue in our own country. No amount of money, or reeducation or legislation is going to eradicate racial discrimination; the only hope is a change in the human heart.

Genuine, biblical Christianity is the ultimate solution for racial discrimination for at least two reasons. First, we know that every person of every people group is created in the image of God. Therefore, every human being has intrinsic worth and is to be valued. Second, Jesus models cross-cultural, cross-racial care and acceptance that we should emulate.

As we pick up His story, Jesus has been the region of Tyre & Sidon which is gentile northwest of Galilee. It was in this region Jesus encountered the Canaanite woman of great faith. Let's continue the story by reading Mark 7:31.

JESUS TRAVELS FROM TYRE/SIDON TO THE DECAPOLIS

Mark 7:31



Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

Sidon is north of Tyre so Jesus first went north and then turned east perhaps taking a big looping route to the eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis.



Part 1.	The Coming of the King
Part 2.	The Authentication of the King
Part 3.	The Controversy over the King
Part 4.	The Training of the Twelve by the King
	→ The Reception in Decapolis
Part 5.	The Opposition to the King:
Part 6.	The Preparation of the Disciples by the King
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The Decapolis refers to a loose federation of ten Greek city-states located east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River (with the exception of Scythopolis). These city-states were established by Greek settlers and soldiers when Israel was dominated by the Greeks.



Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) had a mission: He wanted the whole world to be under the influence of Greek culture in religion, language, philosophy, politics, and values. He died before he could make his dream a reality, but his successors accomplished his goal to a large degree. Much of the known world, including many of the people of the land of Israel, adopted Greek ways.

At its core, Hellenism was humanism. It glorified human beings above all other creatures and portrayed the human body as the ultimate in physical beauty. Truth could be known only through the human mind (divine revelation was rejected as a source of knowledge), and pleasure was a crucial goal in life. Few people did more to bring these Hellenistic ideas to the Jews than Herod the Great and his sons. Though they kept a few Jewish "rules" to pacify their religious subjects (e.g., they did not put their "images" on coins and apparently avoided eating pork), the Herods built theaters, stadiums, and gymnasiums.

It fell to the faithful Jews to resist these cultural institutions and the values they brought. As a result, the Pharisees adopted increasingly detailed laws to remain faithful to Torah (the Oral Law); the Zealots resisted Hellenism more and more violently; and the Essenes withdrew into isolated communities. By contrast, the Sadducees, while maintaining the prescribed Temple ceremonies, often became as Hellenistic as the pagans. Supporters of the Herods, the Herodions, also enjoyed the Hellenistic lifestyle their overlords created.

In 64 BC, the cities of the Decapolis willingly came under Roman rule.

The population of the Decapolis was overwhelmingly Gentile with small pockets of Jews. It was in the region of the Decapolis that Jesus cast out the demon, "Legion". That cost the locals two thousand pigs. It frightened them and they begged Jesus to leave. Before He left, Jesus instructed the man to go home and tell his family what Jesus had done for him. Mark tells us,

MARK 5:20 (ESV)

And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

The man's testimony was effective; when Jesus came into the Decapolis a second time, He was well received. Mark tells us that upon His arrival, a deaf man was brought to Him for healing.

A DEAF MAN HEALED

Mark 7:31-37

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a

speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Notice the first thing Jesus did was to take the man aside privately away from the crowd. After He healed him, Jesus told him and his companions to tell no one. Both actions may reflect the fact that Jesus was no longer doing miracles for the purpose of bringing Israel as a nation to faith, but only for individuals with faith. This may indicate he was a Jewish man from one of the Jewish enclaves in the Decapolis.

Why the Spirit led Mark to describe this healing in detail is not clear; there is no other description like it in Scripture.

The healed man and his companions did not heed Jesus' instruction but instead "zealously" proclaimed what Jesus had done. Their witness plus the previous witness of the man freed from Legion drew people to Jesus from the cities of the Decapolis. This crowd was predominantly Gentile.

Generally speaking, there was no love lost between Jews and Gentiles. Jews looked upon Gentiles as a source of defilement. You would not expect to find a Jewish rabbi spending three days in close contact with thousands of Gentiles.

Yet there was Jesus.

JESUS MINISTERS TO THE GENTILES OF THE DECAPOLIS

Matthew 15:29-31

Those who came brought their sick and hurting. Matthew records:

MATTHEW 15:29–31 (ESV)

29 Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, 31 so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

Those who came stayed with Jesus for three days and ran out of food (they may not have had any to begin with). As His ministry wound down, Jesus was concerned and did not want to send them away without first making sure they had something to eat.

JESUS MIRACULOUSLY FEEDS THE GENTILES OF THE DECAPOLIS

Mark 8:1-9

MARK 8:1–9 (ESV)

1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." 4 And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" 5 And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

We've been here before: the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44). However, here in the Decapolis, Jesus fed 4000 plus Gentiles.

We wonder at the disciples' failure to immediately suggest Jesus miraculously feed the crowd. Perhaps they assumed such a miracle was reserved for the Jews because of the connection to Moses and the manna. Or maybe they were a lot more like us and simply forgot God's former provision when they were in the heat of this moment.

This was significant for the training of the Twelve. They were to learn that God sent Jesus to not only save the Jews, but Gentiles as well.

After Jesus' ascension, Gentile salvation became a major issue in the first generation of the Church. Gentiles always had the opportunity to be reconciled to the true God of Israel, but to do so required converting to Judaism and coming under the Law of Moses. After Jesus' ascension, as the Gospel spread to Gentiles, some taught that in addition to believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, Gentiles needed also to be physically circumcised and come under the Law of Moses in order to be saved. This was no small controversy in the Church. The letter of Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul to deal with this issue. Early on, Peter struggled until he witnessed the salvation of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. Cornelius believed Peter's presentation of Jesus and was indwelt by the Holy Spirit as indicated by his speaking in tongues (Acts 10). Peter learned from that experience that Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus plus nothing.

The Law of Moses came to an end with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The New Covenant was inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God by faith in the finished work of Jesus. Jews and Gentiles are no longer under the Law of Moses, but the Law of Messiah contained in the New Testament.

The feeding of the four thousand Gentiles by Jesus pushed the boundaries of the disciples and opened their minds to the fact that Jesus related to Gentiles much differently than their former spiritual leaders, the Pharisees. Jesus related to them freely, with grace and compassion. He did not fear defilement thus living out what He taught about the true source of defilement in Matthew 15:1-20. For three days, these Gentile "dogs" enjoyed the crumbs of God's blessings from the table of the Jews (Matthew 15:21-28).

There is no racial discrimination in Jesus. Every human being is created in the image of God. Every human being can and must be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. Once we're reconciled to God we are reconciled to one another because we are brought into the one family of God, the Church.

GALATIANS 3:26–28 (ESV)

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

May there never be a hint of racial discrimination in our church.

May we, at every opportunity possible, pursue racial reconciliation in our schools, our workplaces and our community.